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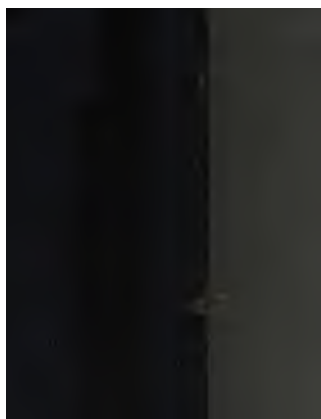
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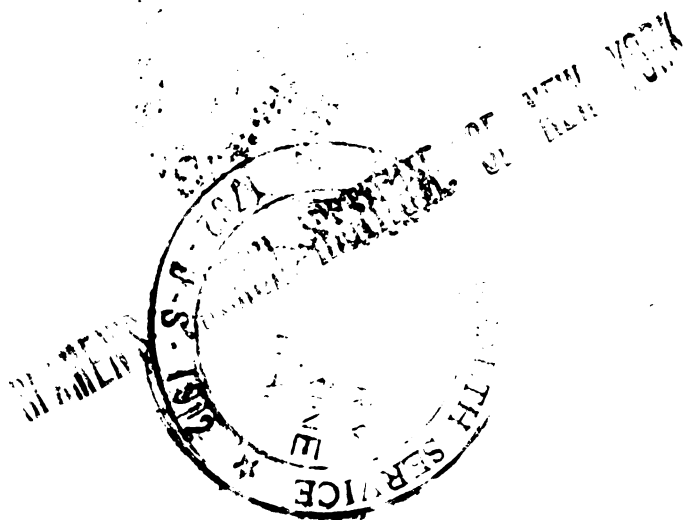
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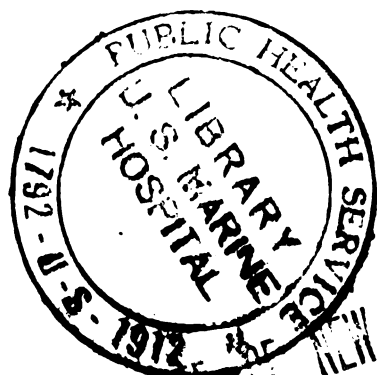
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OVERLOOK HOUSE

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OVERLOOK HOUSE

BY

or
WILL PAYNE

Author of "The Scarred Chin," etc.

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DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1921

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OVERLOOK HOUSE





OVERLOOK HOUSE

I

THE BORROWED CLOAK

OVERLOOK HOUSE stands two hundred feet above the sea — as though a giant had carried out his domiciliary ideas in the Colonial style of architecture. Unfamiliar passengers in the little yachts and launches which ply those waters in the summer season sometimes mistake it for a hotel, or at least a country club, for it seems absurd that a mere family should require so much space as those grey stucco walls enclose. A battery of artillery might manœuvre handily on the brick-paved terrace in front of the house.

From its hill-top the house looks down to the sea across an unobstructed space, but sixty acres of carefully-tended woods screen it from other points of view — running down to the asphalt public road and trolley line which skirt the western boundaries of the grounds. Passengers on that side see only a wall of dressed stone, six feet high, with the woods beyond.

"I want plenty of room," Judge Tillman Crane

had said; and having made that one stipulation he left the other details to his wife and the architect. When he finally surveyed the result — contemplating the broad reach of grey wall and the spacious apartments within — he expressed his satisfaction in an amused chuckle.

On the opposite rim of the continent there is an arid region — sere, barren and forbidding, as though Nature had spoiled it in the making and set a match to it and gone off and left it — which nevertheless teems with human activity. Gaunt derricks arise over it as though a colossal child had been repeating one pattern with a set of rude building blocks. There are many clusters of huge iron tanks, cylindrical in form, painted red or grey. Big iron pipes run interminably over the dun ground. The summer sun is fierce; sand blows, cutting the face like bits of metal thrown from a gun. And everywhere there is the strong reek of oil. It flows black and pitchy into the pipes, but at a far off other end it comes out in a deluge of shiny gold. Six weeks' income from that oily desert settled the bill for Overlook House. Judge Tillman Crane gave an amused chuckle over that, too.

The servants' quarters on the third floor are as roomy as the master's apartments in most houses — even houses that make very considerable pretensions to opulence. A stairway at either end of the house leads up to them; but the stairway is shut off from the main hall by a blank door. Only one

who has some business in the servants' quarters opens that door.

About eleven o'clock of a Thursday morning in the latter part of June, Mrs. Lester Hilton glided northward in the main hall of the second story, approaching the door which gave to the stairway leading up to the third story. She moved quickly, her feet falling without a sound on the thick rug, her dark eyes turning nervously from side to side of the hall as though, perhaps, she feared a door might open and somebody step out to witness her movements. The blank door was straight ahead of her, but a cross hall ran to the right there. Mrs. Hilton threw an apprehensive glance behind her, but the big main hall lay empty at her back. As she looked around again a rather formidable figure strode out of the cross hall, confronting her.

It was the figure of Lena, a maid, in a maid's black gown and little white apron — tall and strongly made but not uncomely. It was, of course, a perfectly familiar figure to Mrs. Hilton; but just now Mrs. Hilton's nerves were taut and tingling, and Lena's blonde face was puckered in a scowl of wrath. The light of battle gleamed in her pale blue eyes, her lower lip protruded, her ample breast laboured, her capable fists were balled — all as though she might immediately fall upon Mrs. Hilton like an enraged Valkyr.

Very naturally, then, Mrs. Hilton's nerves jumped and she drew back. But Lena herself was

no less disconcerted. A look of alarm swiftly succeeded the scowl upon her face. She, too, drew back and began stammering an apology, the exact purport of which Mrs. Hilton did not catch. After one disconcerted moment, Lena turned on her heels and fled down the cross hall. Evidently it had not been Mrs. Hilton whom she had expected to meet there.

Looking in the direction whence Lena had disappeared, Mrs. Hilton waited a moment to compose her nerves and to consider, mechanically putting a finger up to her lips, which trembled slightly. Then she closed her lips resolutely, opened the blank door and went upstairs. The door she sought up there was shut. She listened at the crack a moment; turned the knob and entered the room, closing the door behind her. It was a servant's bedroom, ample like all the apartments in that house, with two windows, simply but sufficiently furnished. If Mrs. Hilton's purpose had been housewifely she might have noted with disapproval that the room was not in order and the bed lay tumbled just as its occupant had climbed out of it that morning. But her purpose was not housewifely. She stepped across to the open closet and at once saw what she wanted — a saffron cloak and a black straw hat, with a military air, adorned with a jaunty red feather.

She took them both, throwing the cloak over her arm and holding the hat in her hand, crossed the

room swiftly and stepped into the hall — and there encountered a second figure almost as disconcerting as the first.

Perhaps a male observer would not have been much disconcerted by this figure in any case. It was the figure of a maid, in the maid's badge of black gown and white apron, but round and lissom, with wavy dark hair, full deep blue eyes, bowed red lips, a straight nose and a dimple in either cheek when she laughed. She was not laughing now, however. Her blue eyes sparkled with anger, her breast heaved, her plump hands were clenched. Dashing toward the retreat of her bedroom and encountering Mrs. Hilton, astonishment swiftly overlay these signs of wrath.

"Oh!" she cried, checking her headlong rush. Then, as soon as she had caught her breath, she asked with a pretty touch of foreign accent: "You want me, Meesus Heelton?"

With the plunder in her hands, Mrs. Hilton could only carry it through; so she said, "Why, Katey, what's the matter?"

Katey seemed to pay no attention at all to the plunder in Mrs. Hilton's hands. Her wrongs rose upon her afresh and with the prospect of a sympathetic listener she gave loose to them, her eyes sparkling, her breast heaving, her fists clenched.

"It's that meesérable Lena, Meesus Heelton! She think she do me up because she is beeg like a horse! I go away from here! I leave right off!

I'm not goin' to be used like a dog all the while. Can I help it if those foolish fellows come all the while honeying around?" She tossed her wavy head in high disdain. "I don't aks 'em come around me. I tell 'em go way and mind their own beesines. Much I care! Not so much like that!" She snapped her slim fingers in scorn. "It's that Louis. I didn't ask him come along. All the while he comes himself. My Goodness, I guess that Louis ees old enough to know what girl he wants to go with! That beeg horse Lena get her clutch on Louis like he's all made of gold and only man in the world! She declare she punch my head, Meesus Heelton. She not punch my head!" Katey stamped her trim foot in outrage over the intolerable idea. "I know what I do," she plunged on darkly, palpitating with wrath. "I get me a good gun! I fix that Lena, she come fooling round me any more. Mr. Ted got a good gun. I borrow it of him." Screwing up her pretty face in the darkest scowl of which it was capable and using the most sinister tone she could command, Katey affirmed tragically, "I shoot one great beeg hole in that horse Lena!"

Mrs. Hilton — in spite of her preoccupation — was trying hard not to laugh. She didn't think that anybody ever need stand in much fear of pretty, good-natured, careless Katey's wrath — fleeting as a little cloud over the sun. The girl had been employed in Judge Crane's household

for several months. Under other conditions her tenure might have been shorter, for she was not a very good maid — being incorrigibly heedless and unamenable to discipline; not because she was impudent or lazy, but because of a gay and childlike irresponsibility. In spite of her good nature and although she seemed never to intend it, she was always stirring up trouble — a sort of disorganizing element below stairs, like a sprightly, adventurous blue jay in a cote of sedate, orderly birds. But satisfactory household servants were hard to get, and notwithstanding her failings as a maid everybody above stairs had a liking for the sparkling, amiable, pretty creature. So Katey remained; and Mrs. Hilton now perceived that she had stumbled upon a down-stairs triangle with Louis, one of the gardeners, as one angle and Katey and Lena as the other two.

So she gave Katey some soothing, paternal advice and assurances, and concluded — since the plunder was in her hands in plain view — with the statement, “I want to use your hat and cloak a little while. I thought you wouldn’t mind.”

“Oh, I not mind at all, Meesus Heelton!” Katey assured her heartily, and — her wrath already forgotten — she showed her dimples as a new idea delighted her, “I be proud for you to take ’em. You look very swell in that hat and cloak, Meesus Heelton. You got the figure for ’em and you know how to wear your clothes. Maybe you get you a

hat and cloak like 'em, so?" A childlike inability to "keep her proper place" as a servant was one reason why Katey would never make an ideal maid.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Hilton with a laugh. "I'll bring them back before long."

"Oh, keep them long as you like — till night — Meesus Heelton," Katey replied handsomely, dimpling.

So Mrs. Hilton went down stairs carrying the yellow cloak and the black straw hat that had a military air, with its jaunty red feather. And as she left Katey, care again took undisputed possession of her mind. The adventure had not started well. Lena had seen her, and then Katey. She had a despairing sense that she was bungling it, and she mustn't bungle it!

She was about Katey's height and build, but older — thirty-two, in fact. Her hair was darker than the maid's — dark fairly to blackness. With dark eyes and a complexion of dusky olive, faintly touched with colour, she looked as though her veins might carry a strain of Jewish blood, although her nose was as straight as Katey's. Without pausing at the second story she sped on down to the ground floor. At that hour the big central hall was empty; spaciouly open doors at right and left showed no glimpse or sound of occupancy. Mrs. Hilton threw the saffron cloak over her shoulders, turning up its collar, paused an instant before a mirror to settle

the jaunty hat on her dark head and fled through the back door.

This was the latter part of June, with trees and shrubs in full leaf under a bright sun; but the wind was in the north, off the cold sea, tingling one's cheeks like an icy bath. Stepping out of the house, Mrs. Hilton saw no one. The garage and stables, where men might be loitering at any hour of the day, were some distance away. She bent her head and fled toward the avenue of slim evergreens that led through the formal garden on that side of the house. At the further side of the garden she took a bridle path which wound down through the beautifully-kept woods and so gained a wrought iron gate in the stone wall along the public road. There she stood against the wall awaiting for the trolley car.

Her journey from the house had been accomplished safely; she had met no one; but her nerves hurt cruelly. The tension showed in her restless eyes and a little mechanical moistening of her dry lips. All the while she was wondering, with a kind of despair, whether she had chosen the best way of going; whether, after all, it wouldn't have been better to have asked for a car and chauffeur and gone in her own proper dress, instead of masquerading in Katey's clothes and going by trolley. She couldn't tell whether or not that would have been better. At any rate, she was committed to the masquerade, and she stood restlessly against

the wall, waiting for the trolley, fearing that at any moment an automobile containing some one who knew her might appear, or a horseback party or a pedestrian. She kept her face down and toward the wall.

Windham lay two miles down the coast — south — from Overlook House. But the branch railroad which served that coast region ran on five miles to the village of Stony Cove, and a trolley line connected the two towns. It was to Stony Cove, at the end of the branch railroad, that she was going.

She heard, to the South, the welcome grinding of the trolley car wheels against the rails and the thin toot of the whistle for the crossroad and stepped forward to signal the car. It was most unlikely that any one she knew would be travelling by that public conveyance; her acquaintances had pleasanter means of locomotion. The public road and trolley line ran along a little valley there, with bold wooded hills on either side. The scene therefore had a pleasant effect of remote, primitive forest; but that effect was preserved, at great expense, by skilled landscape gardeners.

When the trolley stopped, Mrs. Hilton took in its occupants at a swift glance without seeing a familiar face, and climbed in to a seat in the middle of the vehicle where her up-turned cloak collar would protect her in case acquaintances should pass in an automobile. The three-mile trolley ride was a matter of a dozen minutes, and she alighted on

the main street of Stony Cove. There was a granite quarry near by. Salty mud flats at the edge of the village, through which a tidal creek meandered, provided rare clams. In summer time the lobster fishermen found brisk demand for their catches from summer cottagers and from the resort hotels along the coast. These small and partly seasonal industries were Stony Cove's only reason for being. The main street of the village had a weather-beaten, bedraggled air. Mrs. Hilton had never viewed it before except from the seat of an automobile.

She remembered the sign, however — indefinitely — and saw it again as the trolley car rolled away. The sign said "Stony Cove Hotel" and was attached to the wooden awning of a narrow, sad-looking three story frame structure almost innocent of paint. No one wanted to stay at this village hotel; every one wanted to stay on the shore or back in the country; the hotel had that dejected look of finding favour with nobody. Mrs. Hilton crossed the street, passed under the sagging wooden awning, opened the dingy door and found herself in a dim, narrow hall, with a closed door on either side and stairs leading steeply up.

"Up here," said a masculine voice from the top of the stairs, and she ascended swiftly — understanding that he had been looking out of the window and seen her alight from the trolley.

The man who awaited her at the top of the dim

stairs wore his hat and a light overcoat for it was chilly in the heatless hotel. He did not bother to remove his hat as she ascended; in fact, he did not bother to wait for her, but moved down the hall and entered a room, leaving the door open for her to follow. A glance showed that this room was the little parlour of the hotel, with a threadbare ingrain carpet and old-fashioned walnut chairs and sofa upholstered in black horse hair. It occupied a corner of the building however and was quite light. Mrs. Hilton shut the door after her and in the good light the man and woman silently looked at each other — a tremulous, questioning, fearing look on her part; a frown on his part.

He was a handsome man, smartly dressed, but a keen judge might have guessed something unstable and undependable in his good looks. Too many nerves; flighty nerves, another judge might have said. His face was long and thin, with sloping brow and a boldly sculptured profile; his eyes were prominent — thrust forward. Altogether, in fact, his face was thrust forward; over-eager, even avid. If he had removed his hat, his dark hair would have showed a neat part through the middle — a vivid sort of man; one might have got the impression that it would have been somehow better if he had been a woman. There was something sullen in the frown with which he greeted her; but he was pale today, with dark circles under his eyes; and she instantly caught, behind the frown, a look of suffer-

ing. It did not occur to either of them to say "Good morning," or shake hands. The situation was too exigent for that.

She spoke first, saying, "What is it, Lester?" It was the look of suffering in his face that softened her tone.

He motioned to the sofa and when she sat down she kept her hands in her lap. It would have been very natural for him to have wished to hold her hand and for her to have wished him to. But she had come up there with some forbidding things in her mind, and she kept her hands in her lap. He understood it well enough; there were some things in his mind, too. So he let her keep her hands to herself and in addressing her he used her full name, like any friend, instead of the pet nickname what had once been current on his lips.

"I'm in an awful hole, Edith," he said; and then, referring to his talk with her over the telephone when he had summoned her to meet him there, he asked anxiously, "The next mail is at three o'clock?"

"About three — along in the middle of the afternoon," she replied.

"You've seen the judge since the morning mail came in?" He had asked that, too, over the telephone; but he seemed to need a reassurance.

"Yes; we were walking up and down the terrace together — the judge and Mrs. Crane and Teddy and I — for half an hour or so. We were walking

there when I was called to the 'phone and you spoke to me."

His stricken eyes questioned her a moment, and he asked plumply, "You noticed nothing? He seemed as usual?"

She repeated what she had said over the wire, "Why, nothing at all. He seemed just as usual."

This was in the main mere repetition — a prologue. He must say, now, why he had summoned her there in that strange, peremptory fashion. She waited the explanation, and felt the beats of her heart. He glowered at the worn carpet a moment, hating the plunge, and turned whiter; but it had to come. Obscurely and irrationally he blamed her for the necessity of having to tell her. They seemed quite safe from intrusion in that musty, dingy little parlor; completely safe from eaves-dropping, since there was no place for an eaves-dropper; yet he spoke very low and the words slipping out in that bodiless way had their sinister effect:

"A letter to the judge from our office went into the mail last night. If he gets it, it's all up with me." He gave a glance around the empty room and from the breast pocket of his overcoat produced a long, creamy-yellow envelope, addressed in typewriting to Tillman Crane, Esq., Overlook House, Windham. On the reverse side, the flap of the envelope bore engraved directions for returning it in case of non-delivery. There was no

firm name in the return card, but only a street number on Wall Street.

"It was exactly like that, Edith," he said, showing her the envelope. "It will come in this afternoon's mail. I want you to get it, when it does come, before Judge Crane sees it, and put this in its place.' She saw that with some sort of rubber stamp he had made a blur over the two postage stamps on his dummy envelope so that, at a glance, it looked as though it had been through the post-office and the postage stamps had been duly cancelled. In short, he had been very cunning about it. She knew he was capable of being cunning, and her heart hardened; so she still kept her hands in her lap and was looking at them as she replied, fairly in a whisper:

"I don't think I shall do it."

At the moment he thoroughly hated her and could have struck her with pleasure. "It's jail for me if you don't," he said.

She looked up at him then, with a woeful sense of his instability, and although she had hardened her heart she felt pity. "Tell me," she said.

He mortally hated telling her, feeling that she couldn't really understand — was a perfect block-head about such affairs as he had to relate. Nobody could really understand. Telling it made him seem altogether in the wrong, and he wasn't so altogether in the wrong — only some accidents had happened to him. If he'd only had a bit of

luck everything would have been all right, and she couldn't understand how it all really turned on nothing but a trick of luck. With that feeling about it, he hated telling her. There had been a time when he would have dealt with the crisis emotionally — and successfully — kissing her hand, pleading his cause. But unfortunately he had dealt with quite a number of crises emotionally, pleading his cause; crises nothing like this in importance, either. That rôle had been worn a bit threadbare; he felt that kissing her hand wouldn't answer this time. With a secret bitterness, and quite irrationally, he charged her with heartlessness on that account.

"You wouldn't understand it, Edith," he muttered doggedly. "There's a big deal going on in Hidalgo Petroleum — a great lot of oil property in Mexico and Central America. The judge and Danforth Crane are buying it. I know, because they're buying it through us. The English are buying it, too. I know that. There's going to be a big contest for control of it. I know all about it, Edith," he iterated, with a smother of anger, as though she had been denying it. "It's the chance of a life-time to make a big killing. Of course, I bought the stock for myself. Who wouldn't?"

He looked up at her as though challenging her to deny that; but merely buying Hidalgo Petroleum told nothing to the point. He struggled with his loathness for a moment, and went on doggedly:

"We — Pennell, Hilton & Company — handle a lot of business for the judge. He's up here playing with his horses, or cruising around on his yacht, or out at the ranch in California, or anywhere else. He telegraphs or telephones his instructions to us. But often he leaves a great lot of stuff in our hands — so we can get at it, you see, when he's out of town and wants something done about it — wants to sell it or turn it in for a consolidation and so on. For one thing, we've been holding five million dollars of Alpha Oil debentures more than a year. There may be a consolidation or a reorganization, but there's no particular sign of anything happening yet. Those five millions of debentures have just lain there in our hands for more than a year . . ."

She thought she knew what was coming and faced him with a growing apprehension; but he hesitated over it a moment, looking white and sick and miserable.

"I've used some of those debentures — about two million and a half. That Hidalgo Petroleum is going to come out right, Edith. It's bound to. It simply can't help it! It ought to have come out right before this and I'm sure it would if it hadn't been for this last little ruction down in Mexico. That's holding it up; but, you see, it's all straightening out now. The buying will start up again any day. I've bought a lot of it, Edith. It's stuff the banks won't lend much on. I had to have a lot of

money to carry it. I'd never have got in so deep . . ."

But that was a long, technical story, involving many convolutions of the stock market which she could not understand. Looking back, he was fairly at a loss to understand himself how he had got in so deep.

"It's bound to come right, Edith!" he urged, his low voice growing more passionate. "I'm as sure of it as that I am alive. I simply got caught in a place where I had to have money. It's sure to come out right. You know I want the money for you as much as for myself. You have your share." In spite of himself he was taking the sentimental tack again. "I want you to have money; lots of it. I've always wanted that. You like money, and you ought to have it."

She did like money, much money — or the conditions of living that required much money; and she had taken her share of such money as there had been. To herself she didn't deny her guilt on that count, and she kept her eyes to her lap as she asked:

"What does it come to, Lester?"

"It comes to this," he answered. "The last day of every month we send our customers a statement of their account as our books show it; how much they owe us, or how much we owe them, and a list of any securities of theirs that we are holding. That statement goes out to every customer the end

of every month. . . . For three months now Judge Crane's statement has been handed to me before it was mailed. I've changed it — doctored it — so that it showed all the debentures on hand that he left with us . . .”

For a moment he looked at her very miserably, and a kind of limpness overcame him as though he had subtly wilted. “Of course, we have to keep a record, with receipts for the securities that are passed out and all that. I've forged the judge's name. That's what it amounts to.”

Her eyes fell and moistened with pain; she put a finger up to her lips.

But having made that bald confession, he immediately reacted, in characteristic fashion, and exclaimed bitterly, “It would have been all right except for that ass Pennell! . . . Pennell! He doesn't do two hours' real work in the office in a week. He can't! He doesn't know enough! He just stands around with his air of a fine gentleman and a leading citizen and a connoisseur and all the rest of his rotten bunk!” By way of summing up his wrath and contempt, he blurted, “If Ed Pennell's sister hadn't married Judge Crane, Ed Pennell would be playing second fiddle in a suburban theatre today — and getting fired because he couldn't play in tune!”

That was, more or less, an old story to her, although he had never before expressed it with such heat. She might have reminded him that if Ed-

ward Pennell's sister had not married Judge Crane, and if she herself had not been a friend of the Crane family, there would have been no Stock Exchange firm of Pennell, Hilton & Company doing a very flourishing business because it enjoyed the patronage and influence of Judge Crane and his son Danforth Crane; and in that case Lester Hilton would probably still have been the rather hand-to-mouth curb broker and obscure promoter that he was when she married him. But she didn't wish to remind him of that; her mind was occupied by things of far greater importance than his childish jealousy of Edward Pennell.

"I do the work," he affirmed bitterly, "and Pennell pockets sixty per cent. of the income! He never does anything at the office except to ball something up. There would be no trouble now if he hadn't butted in." Finally, he had to blame somebody else and Pennell was the most convenient person to blame.

With a little touch of weariness, she asked, "What did he do?"

He saw that she wasn't sympathizing with him in his blaming of Pennell so he replied somewhat sulkily, "I've told you that we send out statements to our customers at the end of the month. It's always been done that way. But this affair of Tillson, Crompton & Company came up. They're brokers, same as we are. They made a rotten failure and it turned out that they'd been taking securi-

ties of their customers that lay in their hands — practically embezzling 'em. That gave Pennell a great little idea. Without saying a word to me about it he got in an auditor to go over our books and check up the securities on hand and send out statements to our customers, with a circular letter asking the customer to check up the statement and report whether or not it was correct. He thought that would be a fine stroke of business — doing it unexpectedly, you know, on the eighteenth of the month, without notice to anybody in the office; and then if there was anything wrong we'd find it out. . . ."

Of course, something was wrong; very wrong indeed; two and a half million dollars of Judge Crane's debentures were missing. His silence, as he glowered pallidly at the floor, took that wrongness into account.

"And then — to show you what an ass he is — he up and told me all about it," he added. "It was just by accident. I ran across him in the Metropolitan Club about half past six last night, and he up and told me all about it — just what he'd been doing. He said that in order to prevent any possible leak in the office he had decided to keep it strictly to himself, but now that it was done he wanted me to know about it — expecting me to admire and approve his wonderful sagacity. . . . The statements had been put in the mail that afternoon."

His breath seemed to fail him on the last words. He swallowed and rubbed his clammy hands together as in imagination he lived over again that awful fifteen minutes at the club when he had been compelled to sit still and look unruffled while the unsuspecting senior partner blandly explained that those statements had been made out and put in the mail. He mechanically wiped the cold sweat from his brow and when he looked up at her again she knew that he was suffering like a man on the rack.

"There I was, you see," he went on. "The statements were already in the mail. I couldn't stop 'em. I knew the only chance on earth was to catch that statement up here before it fell into Judge Crane's hands. Of course, I didn't dare wire you and I didn't dare trust the long distance telephone with an explanation that you would understand. It was after six o'clock then — near seven when he got through talking. But I remembered from last summer that the night mail from New York got up here after luncheon. I had to bank on that. I went down to the office and fixed up this other statement of Judge Crane's account." He tapped the long, creamy-yellow envelope in his lap. "Then I caught the night train to Boston and the first morning train up here. . . . I thought that ought to give me time to beat the mail. I remembered this place at the end of the railroad and that there was a little hotel here. . . ."

That was, pretty nearly, the end of the story,

and the climax. The defences and alibis which his weakness and vanity were always building up around him sort of caved in. He looked humbly at the charming woman beside him — in a maid's borrowed hat and cloak. In spite of himself his low voice shook: "So I telephoned you from here, Dodo — that you must come at once, life or death, and let nobody know about it. . . . I knew you'd help me out; it's life or death to me."

She kept her eyes to her lap, but he felt that she yielded.

"Of course, I don't want to hang around here," he explained. "Somebody might see me and start up some talk. I want to catch that twelve-forty train back to Boston. . . . It's perfectly easy, Do. Just watch for the mail and slip this letter in the place of the other one. You have the run of the house down there. You can do it easily — and that will be the end of it. I know it's going to come out straight in two or three weeks. I know it!" he repeated with energy. "We'll be fixed for life. . . . You can do it easily. I'll trust it to you, and take the train back to Boston at twelve-forty."

Her eyes were still stubbornly downcast; her mind was full and a-throb, and her heart also. There was a good deal to be said — and of the highest importance — but she felt that this was not the time or place. Just now she must decide whether she would save him or ruin him; and as to that there could really be no debate. She looked up at

him, reached over and took the letter and arose swiftly.

He had been sure all along that she would yield; but her manner of doing it rather daunted him. For a moment husband and wife looked at each other, she standing, he on the sofa. She saw his pallor, the stamp of suffering on his face; and she saw clearly his naked weakness and instability.

"Come up Saturday for the week-end, Lester; we will talk then," she said low.

"I will," he promised with a touch of eagerness as though he were being let off lightly.

She had discovered a pocket on the inside of her borrowed cloak and she slipped the letter into it. And then, unexpectedly to herself — illogically — she stooped quickly and kissed his brow before going quickly from the room. There was a suggestion of farewell about that; and two minutes later he was indulging a resentful feeling of being misunderstood and unappreciated.

Mrs. Hilton went down the dim stairs and out into the bedraggled village street, her mind in a tumult. There was no trolley car in sight and she walked briskly on up the road, where, in time, a car would overtake her. She was aware of her disguise and that was an item in the humiliation that searched her heart. She hated shabbiness, and this was shabby enough! There had been some shabbiness all through. She had not been married very long before discovering that capti-

vating, vivid, dashing Lester Hilton — with his subtle, appealing air of ill luck, gallantly borne — was somewhat shabby inside. Automatically she had sought to hide it, as a woman with proper pride seeks to hide the patched place in the rug by putting something over it. Her married life with him — six years of it now — had been more or less a progressive discovery of patched places. The great windfall of the Pennell, Hilton & Company partnership had promised to set everything right; but she felt now that he was a man who could stand prosperity even less than adversity. When he telephoned her from the Stony Cove Hotel that forenoon her prophetic heart had prepared her for something shameful — but hardly a shameful as this.

Her standing in the Crane family was almost her dearest possession. No doubt, as her husband had said, this trick of changing the letters would be easy enough — as easy, for example, as stealing one of Mrs. Crane's brooches. But there was fairly the bitterness of death itself in the thought that she was going back to Overlook House to betray and outrage her friends' affection for her. It tasted like aloes in her mouth.

Two minutes' brisk walking had taken her out of the village, on a fine asphalt country road, with the trolley track running along its side. There was a foot path on the other side and she kept to that. In her absorption she had fairly forgotten that her

immediate purpose was to let a trolley car overtake her, and it was only in the most mechanical sort of way that she was aware of a purring rumble behind her and a yellow shape sliding past. The shape stopped just ahead and she looked up automatically as a cheery voice called:

"Hello, Katey! Hop in. I'll take you home."

She was looking at a muscular young man in a tan-coloured sweater, bare-headed, his thick yellow hair tumbled by the wind. Having brought his low, rangy, big-headed car to a stop by the roadside he had half turned in his driver's seat, one strong hand resting on the wheel, the other reaching over to open the door so that she could step in beside him. The natural pink of his smooth cheeks was turned bright red by the keen wind and he was showing a beautiful set of teeth in the friendliest of grins.

She had raised her eyes mechanically, and as he got a full look at her face, his grin vanished with the swiftness of a well-managed transformation scene on the stage — as where a flower garden is almost instantly succeeded by a blasted battle field. He looked amazed and stammered:

"Oh — that you, Edith? I thought it was Katey." And his astonished eyes were saying, "That's certainly Katey's hat and cloak!"

She was caught; but her mental processes were somewhat quicker than his, and she had had a much longer, harder discipline. So, without the

least hesitation, she smiled back at him and said,

"Well, take me home, Teddy," and stepped in beside him.

As his astonished eyes were still asserting, "That's certainly Katey's hat and cloak," she gave a little laugh, as the car started, saying, "Yes; these are Katey's things. You seem to know them!"

He frowned a bit, at that thrust, as though it struck home, and stepped on the gas.

"It's just between us, Ted," she went on, in confidence; "a little masquerade. You're not to tell anybody that you saw me."

"Sure not!" he replied promptly, and with a certain fellow-feeling, as of two people both of whom could appreciate the advantage of not being told on.

"I mean it, you know," she said, very soberly. "Not a word to anybody that you saw me. Promise?"

"Oh, honour bright!" he assured her, and smiled again.

She knew that was final, and in the little pause she thought he was rather waiting for some explanation, so in order to distract his mind, she teased him with: "But you did recognize Katey's hat and cloak."

He let the car slacken somewhat; his rosy face set itself grimly; he brushed a hand over his tum-

bled yellow hair and looked around at her in afflicted candour. He was very fond of Edith Hilton — with that touch of filial affection which many young men have for attractive women of greater age. He was, in fact, twenty-four, so that her thirty-two seemed far along in life to him; but in some respects he was not even twenty-four, having been too healthy and happy and too busy with innumerable other things to grow up to his proper age. In utter and afflicted candour he unbosomed himself to her, quite as though she knew what he was talking about:

“Why, Edith, that’s all rot! It makes me sick! Of course, I know Katey. Why shouldn’t I? She’s human, ain’t she?” With intense earnestness, as though it were a vital point which some one had disputed, he declared, “She’s a good little blockhead, Edith. I’d bet my neck there’s no harm in her at all. She likes to flirt and I guess the fellows she takes up with like to flirt, too! But what harm is there in that? I had no more idea that she was at that dance than anything in the world. Billy Harlow and Chet Beals and I just happened to stop there, anyway — just looked in, for greens, you know, to see what was going on. Why shouldn’t I have danced with Katey? There was no harm in it in the world.” He looked gloomily down the road and added, in high affliction, “Peggy’s using me like a dog!”

She had known nothing whatever of the sub-

ject matter of his conversation before that; but his brief statement told her the whole book. She wanted to laugh, but knew that she must not.

"And is that why you were so tickled at the prospect of taking Katey in the car with you?" she asked — understanding that his proper masculine pride had been wounded, so that he must show himself independent when a chance came.

"Why, if Katey was walking to the house and I was going there in my car, why shouldn't I ask her to ride?" he demanded. "That's only human and decent, isn't it?" And then," he added darkly, "I suppose somebody would be saying I had a date with her." But he had to look around at her — hurt and appealing — and add, "Peg's using me like a dog."

A little contraction came in the woman's throat and her heart was constricted. She loved the boy and would have trusted him anywhere in any real test of manly character. But the man she had just left — also hurt and appealing — came up in her mind, and she was thinking, "They're all so much alike — crying to be petted and to have the blame thrown on somebody else." There seemed to be no reason why it should be so, but a feeling of that masculine likeness made her heart ache. She slipped a mothering hand under Ted's thick arm, giving it a little hug, and said, "I'm sure there was no harm, Teddy; it will come out all right."

He took that bit of comfort from her gratefully

and looked more composed. "It ought to come out all right because it is all right," he said more cheerfully — adding, with another touch of gloom, "But it's foolish of Peggy to make a fuss about it."

This powerful car was covering the distance to Overlook House in less time than the trolley had taken. Soon they were sliding into the little valley which divided Judge Crane's wooded hills on the right from another opulent summer resident's wooded hills on the left. And Mrs. Hilton's nerves were tightening up again, for the next step in her adventure was now to be taken.

"Drive on to the further gate, Ted," she said. "I'll get out there — and, mind, this is a little secret between us."

"Sure!" he repeated, and followed her directions.

She sprang out of the car, turned to give him a little smile, and passed through the tall wrought iron gate. A roadway led up to the house, but as before she chose the bridle path on which she was less likely to meet any one. As Ted turned his car around he had a glimpse, through the gate, of her yellow-cloaked figure, topped by the jaunty red feather, going upward through the trees. Then the stone wall blotted her from his view.

Her task was to get into the house unobserved, if possible, replace Katey's borrowed garments and then to keep Katey under her eye as three o'clock drew near, for Katey took the mail from the post-

man and distributed it to the various members of the household. Mrs. Hilton, therefore, must keep watch of Katey, get Judge Crane's letters from her and put the creamy-yellow envelope then in her cloak pocket in place of the one that had been mailed at New York the night before. All that was on her anxious mind as she followed the bridle path toward the house — especially keeping Katey under her eye.

But she was not to see pretty, heedless Katey again.

II

LOOKING FOR KATEY

MRS. HILTON followed the bridle path through the woods, the envelope which her husband had given her in the pocket of her borrowed cloak. The grey bulk of Overlook House came into view across the formal garden which separated it from the woods. She struck into the cloistral aisle between two rows of slim evergreens that led straight across the garden and — she thought — gained the house without being observed.

Slipping through the door she fled up stairs to the third story. Katey's room looked as when she had left it — not in order, the bed tumbled just as when the careless maid had got out of it that morning. Going over to the closet, Mrs. Hilton hung up the maid's saffron cloak and black straw hat with the red feather. Holding the long envelope in her hand she felt it to be a kind of corpse of a murdered man which she must carry about with her and keep hidden until she could dispose of it. It had never before occurred to her that a bit of stiff paper some nine inches long by four wide could be so conspicuous or that a woman's tailored street dress was so bare of hiding places. She tucked the

envelope lengthwise under her arm, gained her own bedroom at the further end of the second story, and there locked it in her jewel case. Half an hour later, she went down stairs.

The house faced toward the sea. From the broad, brick-paved terrace along its sea front a beautifully kept lawn spread downward three hundred yards to the precipitous rock-line of the shore. Boulders — tumbled, gigantic and washed by the tide — lay beneath. Sometimes a heavy storm flung the spray high over the rim of the rocky wall that rose from the water — to the damage of Judge Crane's grass. In any weather except fog, anywhere along that rocky rim, one had a fine view of the sea at large and of the incessant play of waves over the half-submerged boulders along the shore. But to return to the house across the lawn from that vantage point involved something of a climb as the ascent was a hundred and fifty feet or so. North of the lawn, therefore, the judge had built a winding cement walk by which one could make the journey between the house and the rock-rim over easier grades.

As Mrs. Hilton, gaining the main floor of the house, looked seaward, she saw a procession coming up this cement walk at leisurely gate. First, there was a tall, spare but broad-shouldered man in a plaid cap and ulster. He was walking backward and he had hooked the crook of his cane over the dash of a big wicker wheeled chair, so that he

could pull the chair after him. He seemed not to be exerting himself very greatly, however, and he was laughing as he talked to the woman in the chair. That was Judge Crane.

The woman in the chair was tall, also, and of full figure. She wore a thick woollen coat and hat and a lap robe of costly fur was tucked around her. The keen salt air down by the sea had whipped her cheeks pink; her grey eyes sparkled and she was laughing as she looked up at the judge. That was his wife — wedded seven years before, after a dozen years of widowhood during which his fortune had grown like a magic beanstalk. The last person in the procession was not as tall as the judge, but broader, deep chested and bandy legged. A great yellow moustache that might have been the envy of a grenadier barred his broad face in a straight line. He was wearing a somewhat soiled sweater and a cap was stuck on the back of his head, exposing a mane of straw-coloured hair. That was Louis, nominally a gardener, who was really furnishing the motive power for the wheeled chair.

Mrs. Crane was forbidden to walk down to the sea across the lawn — or, rather, to walk up again. Her figure denoted ample bodily vigour. Usually the casual observer would have noted no sign of ill health on her face. When she married Judge Crane — she then being thirty-seven — she had supposed herself to be in the soundest bodily con-

dition and unusually strong for a woman. And when the California ranche house caught fire no one was more active than she, or more competent. As soon as it seemed probable that the north wing would go, too, she remembered the iron box containing the judge's papers. Running up there she picked it up confidently and carried it down stairs and quite a distance away from the house, where they were piling other salvage. She stooped to put the box down and she couldn't understand why she toppled over and was unable to rise.

That had been nearly four years ago and ever since then there had been something in the back of her grey eyes — as though, in spite of all the learned explanations and positive expert statements, she still couldn't understand that the fine machine of her body wouldn't work any more as it used to. It was something as though a college of experts had abruptly announced to her, "You think you are a white woman, but you are mistaken; you're really black"; — an incredible, smashing blow between the eyes out of the dark. Her body looked the same, and usually, when she was quiet, it felt about the same. But inside something had gone incurably wrong — at the heart. At first she had tried to disbelieve the doctors, but when she carried her disbelief into practice by exerting herself as of old she quickly received a fearful and indubitable warning from within that they were right. Something was very wrong there.

She could find that out for herself at any time by running upstairs. Her common sense compelled her to believe what they said — namely, that any such experiment on her part might be the last experiment of any kind she would ever make. So she, who had been a vigorous, out-of-doors woman, found herself limited, circumscribed and prescribed for on every hand. For two years now, Dr. McKeon, whose reputation as a specialist in such matters was the highest, had been all but a member of the Crane household — vastly to his own profit, to be sure.

That was the tragedy — along with a mournful feeling that she had mysteriously swindled the man who had married her, palming off a piece of damaged goods on him; tacitly promising him a healthy, cheering, helpful wife and giving him an invalid. And Judge Crane could never get that cursed iron box out of his mind. If only she had let it burn, and the ranch and everything else! He had to think of her, running upstairs in a burning house and getting that rotten old box in her arms and lugging it way across the ground — and cracking her heart. He built the cement walk so she could get down to the sea in a wheeled chair any time she liked. He had his automobiles especially upholstered for her. There was an electric elevator to take her from the first floor of Overlook House to the second. He wished McKeon's bills were bigger. Damn! If only new hearts were to be had for

money, no matter how much money, he'd have gone down to Wall Street and skinned every man in it from Trinity Church on the east to the elevated railroad on the west but what he'd have bought her one. . . . But what could a man do? This helplessness was rather a new sensation to Judge Crane; rather a bewildering sensation. He wasn't used to thinking of himself as helpless in respect of things he greatly wanted.

It hadn't occurred to him in his widowerhood that he would every very greatly want any particular person. Of course, he wanted his son Danforth, of whom he was very fond; but he had Danforth already. It hadn't occurred to him that to go hungering after any other person was an experience that was in the least likely to befall him. Nevertheless the time came when he did very greatly want her. There was something so gracious about her gaiety; she somehow summed it all up, a finished product, a sort of quintessence. It seemed to him that she was exactly what the money was for — the soul, or flower, of it. He certainly did greatly want her. He had been right decently fond of his first wife, whom he married when he was an unplaced, unprovided young lawyer. To this day he held her memory in respect and affection — a good woman, a sensible woman and a fond woman. But nobody would ever have said, in that special way, that Martha was a finished product, a quintessence. He had gone very far beyond the

unplaced, raw young lawyer who married her; and perhaps Martha really hadn't gone very far beyond that. . . .

Mrs. Crane climbed out of her wheeled chair on the terrace and slipped her hand under her husband's arm. They walked to the front door and into the house together, and in the living room — of the dimensions of a ball room — they found Mrs. Hilton, for it then lacked but a few minutes of luncheon time. Before those few minutes elapsed they were joined by Edward Pennell, Junior, and presently the four sat down together for the midday meal.

Seen at close range Judge Crane's sixty-three years were more evident. His bronze, smooth-shaven, large-featured face bore some deep lines, especially around the mouth. There were times of repose and meditation when the corners of his mouth turned down and the deeply graven lines around it looked like a steel trap that had sprung shut. His mottled eyes, under heavy eyebrows, would then have a singularly unresponsive look and one might get the idea of a large, self-centred animal which would walk calmly over one if so minded. But when he smiled, or laughed, that rather forbidding mask completely disappeared. His whole face lit up sunnily and he showed an excellent set of teeth.

"So Dansby says she's a bit off, eh?" he commented, in response to a report from the stables

which Ted Pennell had orally delivered to him. "Well, Dansby's always saying they're a bit orf." He chuckled, imitating the groom's accent. "He's the gloomiest man I know. I hired him because he reminded me of Pete Beamish." He looked over at his wife, shining with humorous relish, saying, "I don't think I ever told you about Pete Beamish.

"Pete bought a half section of land from the railroad in the Kern River country at two dollars and a half an acre. In those days, that was about as discouraging a country as you could find. Sheep could grub out a living if you gave 'em enough of it to range over, but there was just about enough stuff on a half section to starve a cow. Of course, Pete Beamish stuck to cows. I don't doubt it was enough to spoil his temper.

"Well, I bought his half section — along with some others — for the same two dollars and a half he'd agreed to pay the railroad, although he was a long way from having done it. When we struck oil on it, Pete laid it up against me. They said he was a mormon and had been an elder in the church or something like that over in Utah — before the other elders, that wanted to get a laugh out of life now and then, chased him out of the country. I was on the street in Bakersfield one day, with three or four others, and Pete came up to us.

"I'd never seen him before then; the land buying had been done through an agent; but he knew who

I was all right and called me by name. He looked just about like his land had looked before we struck oil on it. To look at him two minutes would discourage you for an hour—just about Dansby's size; five feet high and only a bone. His face wouldn't even grow an eye-brow—it was only kind of a pucker with a hole in it for a mouth. He called me by name, and he certainly did out and out curse me."

A gurgle and sputter of mirth escaped from the judge as he recalled it. "Pete was some curser, too—regular Nehemiah business, if Nehemiah's the chap I mean. It took him ten minutes, talking as fast as he could make his tongue go. The men with me were sort of startled and indignant at first and might have had a notion of interfering; but it fascinated them, too. Other people came up—quite a crowd in the street—and we were all wondering how long he could keep it up. Naturally, when he stopped, we all roared. That nettled Pete and he started in again—kind of a codicil, although as far as I could see he hadn't overlooked anything in the original document. He took in the crowd that time, and the town, and the Kern River country, and the state and so on up to the nation. I guess the Almighty would have had enough on hand to keep him busy for ten years if he'd filled the order. Dansby reminded me of Pete; that's why I hired him."

"And what became of Pete?" asked Ted Pen-

nell, relishing the story and hoping for a sequel.

The judge pondered it a moment and replied, "That spoils the story. There were two other half sections up there and after we'd struck oil and really knew what we had I gave those chaps a little look-in. Pete Beamish heard about it and came down to Los Angeles and managed to get into my office and begged like a cripple for a little look-in, too. Finally I gave him a little something, although I knew I shouldn't. Spoils the story, you see."

But his wife, smiling across the table at him, said softly, "I like it better spoiled."

"Well, Anne, you never could appreciate a good, plumb, out-and-out cuss anyway," the judge chuckled back.

Near-by, one saw that there were some white threads in her brown hair and faint pencilings of time at the corners of her fine grey eyes; and one would have believed the statement about her which the judge had just made.

Mrs. Hilton, listening to the talk and watching the talkers at this friendly family board, felt an odd touch of unreality about it, as though she were still masquerading. She had changed her tight-fitting dress for a looser garment in whose soft drapery a bit of stiff paper about nine inches long by four inches wide might be concealed. That bit of paper was still upstairs in her jewel case, but it was on her mind every instant — and a sting of

humiliation over the rôle for which she had been cast.

It was a quarter past two when they arose from the table, and the postman would be coming about three. When they drifted back into the living-room she was furtively watching for a glimpse of Katey. It wouldn't be difficult, she thought, to manage Katey if only she could get a minute's speech with the careless maid. Katey's sense of discipline and responsibility was of the most rudimentary sort anyway and generally her good nature was boundless. No doubt she would bring the mail to Mrs. Hilton before any other member of the family saw it if Mrs. Hilton asked her to. She liked Mrs. Hilton, and her pretty head was full of little stratagems and ruses in her own romantic affairs. There would be no trouble — Mrs. Hilton was sure — about managing Katey. But the trouble was to get speech with her. She didn't like to send for her and so — in however slight a way — bring another servant into it; especially not Benjamin, the butler.

With an aimless air, she circulated through the lower story, and at half past two went upstairs and concealed the envelope in her dress. She circulated through that story, and ran upstairs; but Katey's room was still just as she had seen it before. She wondered what servants in this big house did with themselves except when one rang for them. When she got downstairs again it was eighteen

minutes to three and a panic seized her, for the postman might come before three and the fatal letter — after all the elaborate plot — get into the judge's hand by the mere accident of her having missed Katey. And when it came to the test she could bear the exposure, ruin and disgrace of the man whose name she bore almost as little as he could; she must keep the ugly patches hidden from the world if possible.

She saw Ted Pennell lounging in the room rather humorously called the library, at the left of the hall, smoking a pipe and looking over the sporting page of a New York newspaper; and she hastened to him, in her panic:

"Teddy, run upstairs and see if you can find Katey for me," she urged. "Don't let anybody know — part of the secret, you see. Send her down here to me if you see her."

He felt the urgency in her voice and without question hastened to obey. Her thought was that with Ted looking upstairs and she looking downstairs the maid would be found. Again she circulated through the rooms on that floor. But it was only twelve minutes to three now and her panic was increasing. Very likely Katey had left the house for the afternoon and Lena or another servant — maybe Benjamin himself — would get the mail. She knew the postman came up on a bicycle, for she had seen him; but there were two roads — or, rather, one that roughly described a horseshoe,

so that, entering by one gate one could pass the house and leave by the other gate. Two or three minutes passed. She caught up a wrap and left the hall by the west door, going out on the roadway where she could see in either direction. And she had been at that post only two or three gruelling minutes when she saw the figure in greyish uniform pedalling up the road from the south gate.

She walked away from the house to meet the postman, wondering if he would make any difficulties. But he made none at all — on the contrary, responding to her smile and question, he smiled himself, putting his foot to the ground and touching his cap, and gave her the sheaf of letters in his hand, which he had already taken from his leather bag ready to deliver to the house.

Turning back to the house, she slipped the handful of letters under her wrap; but her eye had caught one long, creamy-yellow envelope, a mate to the one concealed in her dress. No one was in sight when she stepped into the hall and without going further she slipped the long envelope into her dress and put her forgery into its place. She then laid the mail on the hall table, and threw off her wrap. The thing was done! But her brain whirled; she felt weak and slowly climbed the stairs to shut herself in her bedroom and lock the stolen letter in her jewel case. . . . The thing was done! She bowed her dark head, put her hands over her face and sat trembling. . . .

As she so sat, callers came to the house — two of them, and in a very unceremonious fashion. They strolled along the brick terrace in front; one of them looked into the hall through the broad glass panel of the door and, seeing that the hall was empty, simply opened the door and walked in. From the hall she glanced into the living-room at the right and the library at the left and then, raising her voice a little, called out: "Oh, Ann! . . . Tilly!" As there was no answer she observed composedly to her companion, "They may have gone out," and began unbuttoning her coat.

She was a fair, plump woman, middle-aged and remarkably composed. One very soon got that impression of her — as though nothing less than an earthquake could discompose her and that not very much or very long. She would still have been called a quite handsome woman, in spite of her middle age and considerably too much flesh. She dropped her coat on the most convenient chair and — chancing to notice the mail lying on the table — coolly stepped up and looked it over. After which she as coolly observed to her companion, "What a lot of letters! Nearly all for Tilly, though — business. Why don't you take off your coat, daughter?" she added.

The person thus addressed was not plump, or middle aged or composed. On the contrary she was slim, with a rose of youth in her cheeks even if the sharp air outside had not brought colour

there. Thick waves of hair stood under the curled brim of her round, snug hat, light blue in colour and like a boy's feminized headgear. By way of responding to her mother's question she only unbuttoned her long coat at the neck and turned away with a little, lithe, impatient movement. It was gracefully done and gave the impression of a cat-like play of springy young nerves and muscles. One might have caught, also, an impatient little smother of rebellion in her fine dark grey eyes, half veiled under long lashes — as though she were there against her will and, for another thing, didn't like her mother's cool examination of the mail on the table.

This was Miss Elizabeth Loughman — Peggy to her friends. She loved her mother fiercely and — at twenty — half the time wanted to spank her, which amused the mother. They were all but members of the Crane household. Once upon a time Tillman Crane had held a minor judicial office by appointment for six months and ever since then he had been called "Judge," just as he would have been called "Colonel" if he had lived in the South instead of in the West. Some years after the judicial incident he began adventuring in oil and presently encountered another adventurer, considerably younger than himself, named Ben Loughman. The younger adventurer was very western — lean and ready for anything, with a joke at the end of his tongue; and that, with sure-footed native

shrewdness, constituted practically his whole capital at the time Judge Crane fell in with him. The judge liked Ben Loughman, and came to have a high regard for his judgment in oil matters. The two men worked together in a free and easy partnership until the careless handling of a gun on a hunting expedition tragically ejected Ben Loughman from the scene in the twinkling of an eye.

He left a wife, a daughter aged nine, and a tangle of more or less speculative business affairs. When Judge Crane was apprised of the tragedy he stared a moment, the corners of his mouth drooped and a deep parenthesis of graven lines formed around them, he swallowed and rubbed his brow and said, "That's too damned bad!" And that was all he ever did say on the subject. But he proceeded with Ben Loughman's tangled affairs on the basis of a partnership. As to those properties in which he and Loughman had had a joint interest he might have simply permitted Loughman's interest to be sold and his estate to be wound up. But he went ahead as though Loughman were still alive. In the continuous process of developing, organizing, capitalizing and consolidating those particular properties a certain proportion of the shares were registered in the name of Mrs. Julia Loughman.

Mrs. Loughman had never known anything worth mentioning of her husband's affairs, and she knew little of her own affairs now — except that an ever-

rising tide of gold poured into her lap. Of course, she loved "Tilly" Crane for it — a few intimates took their revenge for his judicial title by attaching to his bony six-feet-two the absurd nickname of "Tilly." But she would have loved him anyway unless he had treated her quite badly. Her affections were spontaneous and gregarious; she just naturally liked people unless they positively misused her. She was lazy bodily and mentally; she had no ideas worth speaking of; but when she came into a room the atmosphere subtly became more genial; people smiled when they thought of her. Her code was the simplest imaginable — just to be nice and cheerful to everybody; and in her forty-five years of life that simple code had been sufficient. The tide of gold that poured into her lap seemed to her the most natural thing in the world. "Tilly" and Ben had been friends; that amply accounted for it.

When Judge Crane bought the sixty acres for Overlook House he bought ten other acres adjoining it on the south. The same architect built Mrs. Loughman's smaller house at the same time that Overlook was built. The judge charged the amount up to her, but she was uncertain as to how much it was. She walked into Overlook House as unceremoniously as into her own and with the same innocent curiosity glanced at the mail on the hall table. But her slim daughter turned away with a little impatient movement.

About then Mrs. Loughman heard a door close, some distance away, and again she raised her voice, calling, "Anne?"

"That you, Judy?" Mrs. Crane replied from the other side of the living-room and one could have told that there was a little bubble of laughter in the tone. She was still smiling when Mrs. Loughman, followed by her daughter, crossed the threshold into the living-room. The two older women greeted, sisterly.

"But take off your coat, Peg," said Mrs. Crane to the younger woman; and in addressing her there appeared a subtle difference from the manner of addressing her mother. Without any tie of blood there was, between middle-aged Anne Crane and young Elizabeth Loughman, a tie which in its way quite transcended the tie between mother and daughter. In a rough and fond jocularly Judge Crane had once said to the mother, "Something on your mind? Bless your soul, Judy, you never had anything on your mind except your hair and never will have!" That would never be said to Anne Crane. She had many understandings of the restless, mettlesome, high-strung girl which the mother missed. That difference was confessed in the older woman's soft grey eyes as she looked at the girl and in the girl's darker eyes as she looked back and threw off her coat—her slim body in a blue dress slipping out of its dun folds like a butterfly from a cocoon.

And just then, the three women standing a little aside from the door to the hall, Ted Pennell came striding through the door, frowning a bit as though he were in a great hurry and late. In fact, it was then two minutes past three; he had been looking for Katey in vain, and from Edith Hilton's manner he had gathered the impression that it was something urgent. So he strode through the doorway and at once found himself face to face with three females — or more particularly with one female in a charming blue dress and hat, with pink cheeks, whose dark grey eyes under long lashes were looking straight at him.

And, of course, in his confusion, he blurted, "Oh! . . . I was looking for Katey"; and at once coloured red as a beet and glared and strode on, saying to himself, in wrath and despair, "Why was I such an idiot as to say that?" But he had said it, and he rushed on out of the room.

But Katey wasn't anywhere. He heartily wished Katey in tophet. Giving up the quest, he resigned himself to gloom and in a few minutes made for the stables with an idea out of which he derived some crumb of comfort — the idea, namely, that he would ride Blitz and might have the good luck to break his neck.

Meanwhile, like one red flag answering another in signal practise, his blush had been followed by a wave of richer colour in Peggy Loughman's cheeks, and a slight vertical line down the centre of

her forehead showed the hurt. Like most impetuous persons she was easily read and Mrs. Crane read her. The opportunity to speak alone with her came a little later.

"Not quite friendly with Ted nowadays, Peg?" she suggested, confidentially, as the two sat side by side — a woman's confidence to a woman.

Peggy looked down at the nervous hands that stirred in her lap and replied, low, "He has other friends."

Mrs. Crane laughed a little in a way that wouldn't hurt — indulgent to young lovers and sympathetic — and asked invitingly, "What is it?"

It was a rather difficult position for the girl. Ted Pennell was this older woman's nephew — her brother's son; and loved by her like a son. But Peggy loved the older woman, too — fiercely as she had to love everybody whom she loved at all — and she claimed her for the woman's side of this quarrel.

"He's flirting with that maid, Katey," she said, low, her eyes downcast; and then — upon hearing that flat-sounding statement in her own voice, she flamed out, leaning a little toward her companion, looking her in the face, beseeching passionately for a fair understanding:

"I'm not a fool, Aunt Anne! I know flirting doesn't mean anything. If Ted wanted to dance around with a girl of his own set, I shouldn't care. At any rate, he's free to choose. But that maid,

Aunt Anne! I know her. I've talked with her. She's pretty — awfully pretty. And she doesn't know anything. She hasn't any sense — about six years old in the top of her head. I've seen her myself — down at the beach and on the road and in town — always with a man hanging around her and sometimes two or three; some of them young louts from town, I suppose, and I haven't anything to say to them. But there are others, too. . . .”

Commonly she spoke as she moved — a sort of springy abruptness about it; the swift, nervous play of smoothly-acting faculties; feline. Now emotion further charged her clear and sweet voice that came in swift lilts like sword-play.

“I saw her myself one evening — passed her in a car. She was in another car with a man I know.” Her young breast swelled, her eyes sparkled, colour rose in her cheeks. “I wanted to jump out and strike him! . . . It was rotten! Plain rotten! Why would that man be taking up with a maid — taking her into his car — driving somewhere with her at half past eight? I'm not an idiot, Aunt Anne. Plenty of things are no business of mine and I don't care a rap about them. That man I am speaking of, for example. With a woman of his own set — a woman of education and standing, friends, backing — all that; you know what I mean; a woman who can meet him on a level footing and defend herself if she wants to, why I have nothing to say. It's their own affair.

If that man can sell me a gold brick and I don't know any better than to buy it, why the more fool I. Why blame him? I've been trained and advantaged. I've got all kinds of defences if I want to use them."

A little spasm of pain and anger contracted her face. "But that poor little blockhead of a maid — a foreigner, without a cent; no friends that count for anything; nothing at all but the little wages she works for. And no sense, either; only a child in the top of her head. She believes in witches; she told me so herself. She'd believe anything. It makes me furious, Aunt Anne!" Indeed, her cheeks flamed and her eyes had grown dark as her hands clenched. "Those rotten men — cowards and boors, if they do live in good houses and have good manners before us!"

And having unbosomed herself thus far, she paused; her head sank; she confessed, a bit shakily and with a touch of humility: "Of course, I don't mean that for Ted. I'm sure Ted really means no harm — he couldn't. . . ." She struggled over what she did mean for a moment and looked up at the older woman with a world of trouble in her eyes.

"I know as well as you do, Aunt Anne, that Ted's just a kid in a thousand ways — and a spoiled kid, too," she added uncompromisingly. "He's as heedless and gay and generous as a boy." She had to struggle over something else then and lower

her eyes, her head dropping; and to say it very low, "That's why I love him."

She looked up again and valiantly resumed her attack: "He thinks there's no harm because he doesn't mean any. He took Katey to a dance — one dance, at least; or at any rate he was at a dance where she was and danced with her half the evening. He takes her in his car. He had her in his car today. I saw them myself. He says there's no harm; but I know there is harm. It sets her to thinking of men like him — with money and automobiles and all that. It makes it easier for the others. . . .

"Here's this silly little maid, Aunt Anne. You know what may happen to her as well as I do — because she is awfully pretty. The little block-head ought to have prayed to be ugly instead of pluming herself on her bright eyes and fine figure. People like you and I and Ted ought to help her what little we can — the odds all against her anyway. And Ted isn't. He's edging her off the road all the time — not meaning any harm, we'll admit. But he's doing the harm all the time — and then just laughs!"

The vertical line of pain reappeared in her forehead; pain showed in her eyes. "I can't endure it! It isn't fine and generous and high. It's low and careless. He mustn't be so careless of a human being, Aunt Anne! I can't stand that!"

Mrs. Crane looked grave, and her gravity was

quite as much for the girl at her side as for anybody else. She knew well enough that stormy Peggy — partly, perhaps, in reaction from her mother's universal tolerance — went about setting high standards for herself and other people. Probably that would mean a line of pain down her pretty forehead many times, for according to Mrs. Crane's observations people were much apter to talk about high standards than to live up to them.

"I've had an eye on Katey myself," she remarked soberly. "She's much too pretty for a maid and I wish heartily she was out of the house. But turning a maid into the street without a job is a poor form of charity, and except an all-round heedlessness that drives poor Benjamin to distraction there's nothing in particular to complain of in her. But, Peggy dear," she went on in a more personal address, "I'm quite sure that you're mistaken about Katey. She is appallingly ignorant and she might strike you as not having a wit to her name; but I'm quite sure you're mistaken about her. Instincts are a lot better to go by than reasons, after all, and Katey has her instincts. If you would inquire, I'm confident you would discover that Katey knows how to take care of herself perfectly well. Probably she's ready to flirt with any presentable man who looks at her, but I'm confident he'll find his match in her even if she does believe in witches."

She smiled at the girl and would have liked to say, "Don't make a tragedy out of a comedy, Peg.

That only breaks your heart for nothing and there are plenty of real tragedies." But she was too wise to say it, merely repeating, "I don't believe Katey is nearly as helpless as you think."

That view somewhat dashed Peggy. She felt bound to give weight to the older woman's experience however and only murmured, inconclusively, "I hope so."

"All the same," Mrs. Crane continued, "I agree with you that Ted mustn't be careless. He's only careless, Peggy; but he mustn't be in this case. I'm going to talk to him myself."

That suggestion was a little startling to Peggy who looked troubled and interposed, "Not as coming from me, Aunt Anne. You see, his pride is up now — interfering, he'd called it. You saw, when he stepped in, the first thing he said was that he was looking for Katey."

Mrs. Crane laughed and replied, "We'll save his precious pride, Peg. Whatever happens we must save our men's pride, although they sometimes do little enough to save it themselves. . . . And I think I've been careless myself. I must look more to Katey."

There they left the subject, for Mrs. Loughman was rejoining them. But about that time Katey's name was being mentioned in the servants' quarters also. The housekeeper was saying, irritably, that the girl ought to be there and wondering where in the world she could have taken herself to.

It came four o'clock and a quarter past, and Katey was still missing. Judge Crane then returned to the house, in the best of spirits, after an invigorating hour and a half behind a span of prize-winning greys. He picked up a handful of mail from the table in the hall and went upstairs, turning the letters over as he went. He noticed a long creamy-yellow envelope which he recognized as coming from his brokers, Pennell, Hilton & Company, and he wondered incidentally what they would be sending him a communication of that bulk about at that time.

On the second floor he went down the hall to the den where he usually looked over his business matters, and he had gone a third of the way across the spacious room toward the broad writing table by the window when Benjamin, the butler, came hurriedly in through the open door.

Benjamin was half a foot shorter than the tall judge, but broad and amply cushioned with flesh. He wore a little grizzled side whisker—a mere patch—in front of each ear; his face was colorless and there was dignity in his double chin. But just now he was by way of throwing his dignity overboard. He entered the room hurriedly, agitation in his aspect. Coming quickly up to the judge he began speaking under his breath, in nervous haste, rubbing his fat hands together as though he were washing them in invisible water.

Judge Crane listened with an incredulous stare;

asked an incredulous question. Benjamin went over it again, with some jerky gestures and more rubbing of his hands. Astonishment was pictured on the judge's face. He questioned the butler further, and the butler further affirmed, with a jerky gesture, rubbing his hands.

The judge looked at the wall, his strong shoulders stooping a bit, while his mind adjusted itself. A change came over his face; the corners of his mouth drooped; the deep lines around his mouth settled into a metallic rigidity like a steel trap that has been sprung; his eyes dulled heavily. And so, stooping a bit, he looked like a ponderous and formidable animal crouching to charge.

"Come with me," he said and put a strong arm on the butler's fat arm. Partly pushing the butler ahead of him, he went from the room.



III

INTRODUCING SAMUEL THORP

MOSTLY "below stairs" was only a figure of speech in Overlook House, for such servants as slept under its broad roof had their quarters on the top floor. There was, however, a literal below stairs, or cellarage. The furnace room was down there, walled off from the remainder of the basement by a thick cement partition; cave-like, lighted by electrics even in the day time, with coal bins and many asbestos covered pipes. At the other or north end of the basement was a general store room and a laundry. The latter was in operation only two days in a fortnight when a crew of charladies recruited from outside the house fell upon the accumulation of soiled linen. At other times it was empty, with some hillocks of linen accumulating on the floor against the next period of cleansing.

James Thorp inhabited this subterranean region — not a servant, but an independent and self-respecting American citizen of the village of Windham, where and whereabouts Thorpes had dwelt back to far colonial days. Down a side street there, and partly behind a modest frame dwelling, stood a weather-beaten shed over whose door ap-

peared the sign, "J. Thorp, Plumbing and Tinsmith." But during as many months of the year as Overlook House was open, the shed was locked up, for during those months Mr. Thorp plied his trade in Judge Crane's basement where he was furnace-man and odd-jobs man, handy at fixing a leak in the plumbing, handy at almost anything — an industrious, frugal, capable citizen, minding his own business and duly grateful for the chance which had brought him this excellent job, with tip-top steady wages and comparatively little to do when the weather was warm.

This admirable furnace-man had a superior cousin named Samuel Thorp who was comparatively opulent. By his father's will he held certain real estate in Windham which yielded him an income of near five hundred dollars a year. He also had a Yankee handiness and sometimes good-natured consented to exercise it for hire; but mostly he preferred to contemplate life and discuss the rather important figure which he himself cut therein.

It was a rather scandalous figure, too, by his tell, for he confessed to all the genteeler vices. Sometimes he did play "penny ante" poker and sometimes he did get drunk; but in his conversation those comparatively mild exploits took on a dark, indefinite extension. In confidential talk with his village friends he wrought woeful destruction among the fair sex, of which, however, there was

no particular evidence elsewhere. Of all the opinions that had ever been passed upon him the one that galled him most was that expressed by Mrs. James Thorp—namely, that he was really as harmless a loafer and liar as ever lived.

For Cousin Sam, Overlook House had a great fascination. The industrious furnace-man never had anything to say about that establishment, partly because he never saw anything there to talk about. But Cousin Sam had all sorts of surprising information about it, even down to the exact amount of Judge Tillman Crane's monthly income. He spent a considerable part of the summer hanging around there—in the main literally below stairs, yet even down in the furnace-room his mind was alive to the luxury above.

About noon of this Thursday—having come up from Windham by trolley—Cousin Sam strolled leisurely up through the woods toward the house in a smart suit of light yellowish plaid which he had purchased the day before. It lacked quite a bit of fitting him, for his figure was not custom made. He was tall and strong, but his shoulders sloped to an unusual degree, his neck and head being uncommonly long. He himself had some misgivings about the fit of the suit, but with a blue fore-in-hand tie, a new stiff straw hat set at a rakish slant on his long head and a bamboo stick in his hand he felt that some imperfections might be overlooked.

Overlook House was particularly attractive to him this summer. He had held several conversations with Katey, the pretty parlor maid, and on that slim foundation had built up some romantic ideas which would have sent Katey into fits of laughter. Following the roadway up the first sharp swell of wooded ground Sam turned and casually surveyed the scene below. A swift-moving object in it attracted his attention and he immediately identified that object as young Pennell's car, for although one of his pale eyes had a cast, giving a fairly wall-eyed effect, little within his range of vision escaped his notice. A minute later he observed that Katey was in the car with young Pennell; and as it was then about noon he reflected that that was going some! . . .

Up the shore toward Stony Cove there was a public bathing beach, with a row of little shops in which candy, pop-corn, sodawater, picture post cards, seashells and like gear might be bought; also with a square-one-story dancing pavilion where any one might exercise his feet for a dime if he could find a partner. On the Saturday evening before this Samuel Thorp had been there — in pursuit of his career as a reckless blade. He had hoped to see Katey, whom he had encountered there before. Half past nine or so Katey came in alone; but before Sam Thorp could get up his courage — which was largely of a conversational nature — to approach her, young Pennell and two others came in.

Young Pennell looked about, saw Katey, made directly for her and took her out on the floor. After that dance they sat against the wall talking, both — but especially young Pennell — in high spirits. They danced again. Then they went to the counter in the corner, sat on a high stool and ate ice cream, after which they danced once more.

For all of which there might have been an innocent explanation, but in Samuel Thorp's opinion innocent explanations were for block heads. Somewhat later he had looked around for Katey and couldn't find her. Young Pennell, too, had disappeared. . . .

So now, with the memory of that dance in his mind, Cousin Sam sidled off into the woods and stood carelessly behind a tree where he could see the roadway. But the car did not come up the roadway; instead Katey came up the bridle path alone. Through the trees Cousin Sam caught various views of her rapidly-moving figure in saffron cloak as she made for the house. All of which, at high noon, was certainly going some! By his own route of the roadway he followed Katey to the house, and went down into the furnace-room with a lively agitation in his mind. But he said nothing at all to pokey Cousin Jim of what was in his mind for he could be terribly astute when he chose.

He hung about the house all day, and about half past five — once more — sauntered out of the furnace-room, meaning to go home. Near the north

end of the basement the ground had been scooped away and a wide cement pavement laid so that a wagon could drive down to the outside door of either the store room or the laundry, and that little artificial valley was screened by shrubbery on either side. The kitchen was just beyond, and it made a sort of commons in which ladies and gentlemen on Judge Crane's payroll sometimes incidentally met and held a little sociable conversation. Sam Thorp — on terms of loquacious familiarity with most of the ladies and gentlemen — had drifted out there several times during the day, but had not seen Katey. He was going home that way now.

The most convenient route lay through the store room and laundry. Passing through the store room he laid his hand on the laundry door, but found it locked, which was odd. It certainly hadn't been locked two hours earlier, nor ever before within his recollection. A door that was locked now but hadn't been locked before would have aroused his curiosity in any case. Stealthily he tried the knob again, and stooped to squint at the lock. Listening at the crack he could hear nothing; but if the door was locked it seemed clear to him that somebody was in there — or had been in there — who didn't wish to be observed. That was enough for Samuel Thorp.

Plodding James Thorp, the furnace-man, never encouraged any exercise of curiosity concerning

Overlook House. The frugal, lowly man had a wholesome fear of getting into trouble and losing his excellent job. So Cousin Sam moved warily now lest he provoke his dull relative's resentment. He at once remembered that there was a step ladder in the store room; there was hardly anything he had ever seen there that he didn't remember. Tip-toeing over, on his big feet, he got the stepladder, which he cautiously placed against the door and so climbed up to the transom. Lest a passing guest might be offended by sight of the servile operations which went on therein, the outside windows of the store room and laundry were of lightly-frosted glass. By ill luck this transom over the door between the two rooms was of the same material and Cousin Sam could see nothing. But in such an affair as this he was not easily balked. Investigation showed that the frosting was on his side of the glass. He got out his jack knife and soon, by careful work, had a tiny peephole to which he could apply his eye.

Still he saw nothing. The laundry was quite empty. It was not as light in there as one could wish, the sun's rays being obstructed by the frosting on the outer windows and also to some extent by the shrubbery that screened the little artificial valley. Sam looked with all his might. Several heaps of soiled linen lay against the further wall. On one of them what looked very much like a man's coat had been thrown down. Then Sam saw some-

thing shining below the coat and made out a pair of bronze-colored slippers with imitation diamond buckles. He instantly knew those slippers — having a good wall-eye and one other for such phenomena. Only one servant in that household went about flaunting her trim feet and pretty legs in open defiance of proper servile footwear. Those slippers were undoubtedly Katey's.

By that time nothing less than a stone wall or a minatory eye could have balked Samuel Thorp. As neither obstacle was present he tip-toed his step ladder back to its place and addressed himself to the lock in earnest. It was a common door lock and the key had been withdrawn from it. Being naturally handy and intensely inquisitive he had dealt successfully with a situation of that kind before. Before this also he had ranged the store room with the mere aimless inquisitiveness of a crow, so he knew exactly where to find a piece of wire and a pair of pinchers.

It was getting on toward six o'clock now and he had to hurry lest plodding Cousin Jim step in there, note what he was doing and interpose foolish objections. But in a minute he had the wire bent suitably and was industriously picking the lock with it. The door opened and he stepped into the laundry. When he came out, a minute later, he had a mind full and running over. But he carefully locked the door after him, replaced the pinchers and hid the wire.



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Both the laundry and the store room had outer doors, opening to that artificial cement-paved little valley, so that a wagon driving down there could receive or deliver bulky objects. And they had inner doors, opening to the basement. But there was still another means of gaining access to them. Sometimes bulky objects were moved from them to the floors above. So the automatic elevator ran down into the storeroom. Without risk of being seen by any one outside the house, or by any one in the open part of the basement, a person could come down from upstairs in the elevator and go back again in the same way. That circumstance was in Samuel Thorp's mind against a background of vague suspicion.

A large satisfaction was in his mind, too. No doubt some other people were pretty smart; but not smarter than Samuel Thorp! He possessed, and cherished, a nickel-plated cigarette case on which the nude figure of a female was stamped in colors. Taking that object from his pocket he got a cigarette and lighted it, casually setting his straw hat at a little sharper angle on his long head. He had meant to go back to Windham by dinner time; but now changed his mind and sauntered over into the cavernous furnace-room. Hopeless Cousin Jim — a somewhat undersized person, with a bullet head and stubby red mustache, clad in overalls that came up almost to his armpits, an undershirt and a greasy blouse — was sitting there on the end



of an overturned packing case and taking the cover off an ample tin dinner pail.

"Got a little nourishment to squander on a fellow-pilgrim, Jim?" Cousin Sam asked jauntily — for he usually spoke in an ornate manner.

"Sure," said Cousin Jim, without enthusiasm, but without resentment.

"My corporosity could assimilate a little manna right now," Cousin Sam observed; and he stood expectantly by while Cousin Jim's stubby toil-marked hand lifted thick sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, doughnuts, pickles and a wedge of pie out of the tin pail. As a matter of course, Jim divided the wedge of pie in halves with his jackknife, sharing the meal equally with Sam. To Cousin Jim, relatives were an obligation, like going to church when one was able. Avoiding one's obligations was an expedient which never occurred to his simple mind. He realized Sam's failings, but relatives were relatives, as one's hand was one's hand.

Cousin Jim commonly stayed on duty until eight o'clock or so, then tramped down through the grounds to the public road and took the trolley to his home in Windham, returning to Overlook at six o'clock in the morning. He supposed Sam would hang around and ride home with him. But soon after the contents of the dinner pail were consumed, Cousin Sam drifted away by himself. He had business on hand that evening — momentous

business — which would require his presence in that vicinity indefinitely.

An hour or so later — that is about half past seven — Louis, the stocky gardener, left the garage, in the second story of which he had his lodging, and struck off into the woods, not following any road or path. After he had walked some distance he noticed, among the trees not far ahead, a slope-shouldered, long-necked figure in a suit of yellow plaid topped by a stiff straw hat set at a rakish angle, a bamboo stick in its hand. Louis recognized the figure, for it was well enough known to everybody about the place, but he thought nothing in particular about it. In a moment Cousin Sam saw him, too, and greeted him airily:

“Well, Louis, how you obsquatulatin’ this evening?”

This citizen Thorp had a great number of strange words, such as no other English-speaking person seemed to use, the meaning of which was quite obscure to Louis. But the gardener realized that his own command of English was limited; also that Citizen Thorp’s intentions were always very sociable. So he smiled, replying, “All right,” and kept on his way, Citizen Thorp dropping out of his mind almost as soon as the visible image dropped out of his eye.

But it was not so with Sam Thorp. Knowing all the gossip of the servants’ quarters, he had

something particular in his mind about Louis, which caused him to grin. He grinned rather easily anyway, his mouth being of the loose sort, as though it were continually coming unbuttoned. Grinning and making sure that Louis was moving on among the trees out of sight, he continued his slow stroll.

The sun was setting now, its rich light beautifully flooding the undulating woods. As the light began slowly to mellow and die Sam edged toward Overlook House. When it was dusk, so that a moving figure could not be seen at a distance, he slipped into the avenue of evergreens that led through the formal garden at the west of the house, and at the outer side of the garden sat down on a bench under a flowering bush where he could see the west elevation of the big house very well and — probably — not be seen. There he waited.

Meanwhile Louis, in the rich sunset light, had taken up a position beside a big tree from which he could watch the bridle path that led from the house and at the same time slip out of sight among the trees in case anybody came along whom he didn't wish to have see him. His present status in the household was a bit uncertain. Amid the affluence of Overlook, Judge Crane innocently retained some democratic ideals of his early western days. For one thing, he didn't like "flunkies." Any male person in livery was a flunkey; but this same male person, performing the same menial of-

fices without a livery, was merely a servant, and so not at all repugnant to the judge's democratic faith. Therefore there were no flunkies, properly speaking. Since the wheeled chair was often in use Louis was quite as apt to be employed around the house as on the grounds; but he was still nominally a gardener.

His status in another respect was more unsettled. Such passages and declamations as commonly lead to matrimony had occurred between himself and Lena, the muscular maid. Louis himself had considered that affair as good as settled. Then came a witch — of Polish extraction, it was said — with lissom body as graceful as a cat's, dancing blue eyes, bowed red lips and an amazing lack of any sense of responsibility. So Louis was now certain of only one thing — that there was something in his heart that made him drunk and stung him; and that, except when that heady intoxication rolled over him like a wave, he was mostly miserable.

He was now waiting for Katey; but he had chosen such a position that, while not missing Katey, he could discreetly withdraw out of the vengeful Lena's sight, in case Lena should be looking for him. Katey had promised him to come and he had in his pocket two tickets — at a dollar and a half a piece — for the extraordinary theatrical performance at Windham by which he had bribed her to promise. Louis was thirty-two — not a

young man, but at a time of life when one's status ought to be getting settled. Not a handsome man either, and undeniably bandy-legged as many a square-built person of great bodily strength is. He had an obscure idea that what attracted Katey was his strength or, perhaps, the big yellow mustache that barred his square face straight across. And sometimes he was tormented by the idea that which attracted Katey was just taking him away from Lena. But he couldn't help it; he couldn't help anything any more.

His heart beat sensibly and his eyes burned along the path as he waited for her to come gliding into view. The light that flooded the woods grew mellow and presently began to die. Louis waited until it was quite dark and the extraordinary theatrical performance at Windham had been going on for some time. And Lena was amply revenged, if she had but known it, for the night that gathered in Louis' heart was deeper than that which mysteriously drowned the woods, under a moonless sky. At length he plodded heavily away — mercifully hidden by the night from all unbearable human sight — out of the woods and down to the sea.

Instinct led him to the right spot down there. Somewhat to the south of Overlook House a long tongue of water ran into the land, as though a huge wedge had been driven into the rock shore at the sharpest angle, leaving a great granite splinter.

thirty rods long, on the seaward side. That long tongue of water, confined between precipitous granite walls, and fretted by many great boulders in its bed, behaved very rudely at high tide, especially if the wind was in the south. Toward its upper end broken rock and drifted shingle formed a bar which was only a foot or so under water at low tide. Above that bar the basin was deeper and more strictly confined by sheer rock walls. Into that basin at high tide — especially when driven by a south wind — the waves piled and couldn't well get out, so they tore and roared and seethed and boiled in there most forbiddingly, tumbling and eddying in every direction, but still with a main circular drift round and round.

Long ago the spot had been named the Devil's Coffee Pot, but at Overlook House it was commonly known just as "the pot." It was a source of some little annoyance to Judge Crane. As the pot was a locally famous natural wonder, he didn't quite like to fence it off and forbid access to it, so the path along the shore through his grounds was undefiled by signs of warning against trespass. But sometimes tourists who had satisfied their curiosity regarding the pot proceeded to satisfy it regarding other parts of his estate and even regarding the aspect of his house as seen through the windows. He compromised by putting up a sign, "Please keep to the path."

The pot was a source of speculative fascination

to Ted Pennell, who had spent a good deal of supposedly valuable time tossing pieces of wood into it, studying the currents and wondering, adventurously, whether a man who jumped into it in a bathing suit, at high tide, would get out alive. He had a sort of feeling that he could never be satisfied until he found out. As though the Satanic designer had wished to enjoy his pot in privacy a long heap of tumbled rock had been thrown up near it as a sort of rude screen. Round that screen Louis walked, the tumult within him drawn to the tumult of waiter. But it was low tide now; the pot only murmured and tossed a bit in its slumber. So Louis sat down on the rock screen and stared out to sea — a dusk immensity which pulsed in long, noiseless heart-beats and murmured at the crags. His woe was even more immense than that.

And on the following day, Friday, he learned that Katey had left the house for good. She hadn't been discharged; but had left abruptly of her own accord and would not return. That terse statement, emanating indisputably from Benjamin himself, had circulated through the servants' quarters until it reached Louis.

That Friday evening Lester Hilton left New York to spend the week-end at Overlook House, as he had promised his wife. Danforth Crane, the judge's son, came up on the same train with him. Not that either of them particularly cared to travel with the other; but trains are free to anybody.

Danforth Crane regarded Lester Hilton — insofar as he bothered to regard him at all — with a mild and cool toleration. Lester Hilton was well enough aware of it and secretly hated him for it. Outwardly, of course, he could afford no such ruinous extravagance as would be involved in any display of that sentiment toward the man who, with his father, was making the fortunes of Pennell, Hilton & Company. Outwardly, as a matter of course, he made every display of esteem and friendship.

Saturday morning, by chance, the two men left Overlook House at almost the same time for a walk and a mouthful of the fresh sea air. But since they could easily escape each other and that was what both of them wanted to do, they turned in opposite directions.

The sharp north wind of the Thursday before had turned gentle and southerly, bringing genial weather — expansive and bland as one strolled across the luxuriant grounds looking off at the shining sea. But there was nothing bland in Lester Hilton's mind. The brutal luck down in Wall Street still held, and he'd had a half-hour's talk with his wife — inconclusive, but sombre enough, too. His mind was gloomy, and deep down in him his heart quaked. Could it, after all, come to utter smash with him? His lean and over-eager face puckered as he asked himself that fateful question of the sea, and he felt a brutality in the sea's bland indifference.

As he walked toward the water a sound arose upon his ear — a long roar. Remembering the pot then, he thought the tide must be high — worth looking at anyway, for one who had nothing else to do. He went around the screen of tumbled rock, stepped down through a little crevice in the granite and came out on the rim of the pot. The tide was high and the pot boiled finely — a wild tumult of prisoned water, seething and whirling in every part, now churned into milk and the next instant showing faint streaks of green as the waves rolled in and couldn't get out. The whole surface rose and fell in long, spasmodic pants, boiling up and sinking down, but every part of the surface was in its own motion. Hilton looked down at it a couple of minutes and an idea occurred to him — or hardly an idea; more like a thing that pushed itself into his mind. The meaning of it was that if one stepped forward some twenty inches all this trouble would be over for ever.

He turned hastily, scrambled up the little crevice, and strode away almost as though the putative designer of the pot had reached a physical hand for him. He went back toward the house, circled its north end and approached the west door. So approaching, he glanced mechanically downward into the little cement-paved artificial valley with a screen of shrubbery at either side by which one gained the service doors of the basement. Two figures stood in the depression by a laundry window

and the extraordinary action of one of them arrested Hilton's attention. He identified that figure as the square-built chap with a ridiculous mustache who pushed Mrs. Crane's wheeled chair. He seemed to be in a paroxysm of some sort — snatching the cap from his head, hurling it furiously to the ground, clutching a hand in his tow head, confronting the other figure as though about to fall upon him — or perhaps he was about to have a fit.

Then the second figure saw the guest and called out, "Good-morning, Mr. Hilton."

Whereupon the first figure glared around, snatched up his cap, and ran away. The remaining figure was clad in an absurd, ill-fitting plaid suit of a light yellow color and wore a stiff straw hat at a rakish angle. Hilton indefinitely remembered him as some one he had seen about the place. . . .

All Friday Samuel Thorp had, so to speak, carried a cannon firecracker with a lighted fuse around in his mind. He wanted that cracker to go off, yet he was afraid it would while still in his possession. For just once in his life he knew something that he didn't tell about. Indeed he was rather helpless and half paralysed about it, for it was a thing that his imagination could hardly embroider. The truth itself exceeded any lie he could think of and so, with a sort of helplessness, he kept still.

Friday and Saturday morning he haunted Over-

look House more closely than ever — considerably to the annoyance of plodding Cousin Jim who felt that the haunting might be prejudicial to his good job; but one's relatives were the will of Providence, no doubt, like boils. Saturday forenoon, sauntering out once more through the store room to the little cement valley, Cousin Sam saw Louis the gardener, who looked downcast, and was walking by on the ground level. The temptation was excessive.

"How you segashistin' this morning, Louis?" Cousin Sam called out, genially, giving his own joke the tribute of a broad smile, and starting up the cement incline.

Any friendly voice subtly warmed the gardener's forlorn heart. He paused, smiling rather wanly and replied, "All right."

Cousin Sam joined him on the ground level, yearning to cast in a line and see what fish he could catch, yet a bit dubious.

"This is what your Uncle Abner would call something like," said Sam, meaning the fine weather. "It does sure start the sap to perambulating in a man. I'm thinkin', if this holds, I must get me a fish pole and a jug of corn juice and mingle with old mother Nature for a spell." He favored the gardener with a wide, loose-mouthed grin, looking tremendously experienced out of his pale eyes as he added, "I aint been spiflicated right since New Years. I believe it would do me a world of good."

Louis smiled, somewhat wanly, at this pleasantry.

"Guess, from all the signs and tokens that I've been observin' round here, some other people have had more luck," Sam continued, with his worldly-wise grin.

"Somebody been drinking?" Louis inquired, not with any interest in the subject, but to be polite.

Sam's grin broadened and he rallied the gardener: "You don't know nothin' about it yourself, eh, Louis?"—his manner implying that Louis knew all about it and was discreetly concealing the fact.

"Me?" said the innocent Louis. "No, I don't know anything about any drinking."

"You wasn't participatin' in that little celebration Thursday afternoon?" Mr. Thorp pursued with an incredulous air.

"Celebration?" Louis repeated. "No. I had no celebration."

"No?" said Cousin Sam. "I reckoned probably you was takin' a hand in it. Somebody was sure havin' a right merry little party Thursday by all the signs and tokens—and gettin' spifficated for fair, or I'm a fish."

"Around here?" the gardener asked.

"Sure!" Cousin Sam replied, with a depth of conviction. "Katey, that Polish girl, was stewed to the gills."

Louis' eyes winced as though he had received a

stab; and the look of mere incidental interest on his face was succeeded by something tense and wounded. "Katey?" he repeated, and choked a little over the word.

"Sure!" Mr. Thorp declared again. "I saw her myself — laid out to dry off."

It was a moment before Louis could manage his voice to ask, breathlessly, "Where?"

"Right there in that identical laundry," said Samuel Thorp, with the air of producing incontrovertible proof, pointing to the glazed window. "Pretty generally I come out through the store room and laundry, you see. Thursday afternoon — about five o'clock or some after — I started along the trail. But the laundry door was locked. Thinks I, 'That's kind of queer; this door was not locked a while ago; it aint ever been locked far's I remember.'"

As Samuel Thorp began speaking Louis had started mechanically down the short descent and Sam walked down with him, still speaking. "Thinks I, 'That's kind of queer,'" he repeated. Looking around at Louis he cackled and went on, "Bein' as I'm naturally of an inquirin' turn of mind I thought I'd do a little prognosticatin' — just to be sociable. So I got the step ladder and climbed up to the transom and scratched a little hole in it and peeked through and there — sure's you're a foot high! — was Katey layin' over there on a pile of dirty clothes. I saw her plain's I'm

seein' you — plumb saturated, as the old Hebrew prophets used to say."

They had halted. Louis was staring at the glazed window and something was suffocating him.

"What time — what time was that?" he managed to ask.

"Long about five o'clock, or some after," Samuel Thorp replied, an uncertain grin fixed on his face as he watched the effect of his disclosure.

Louis obscurely knew that this man was torturing him. But he had no time to think about that aspect of it. He had inquired, as well as he could, about Katey's abrupt disappearance from Overlook House. As it was repeated to him, Mr. Benjamin had said that Katey telephoned about three o'clock to say that she was not coming back. Samuel Thorp was talking about five o'clock or something after. Mechanically Louis' tortured eyes travelled upward along the great grey wall of Overlook House. It loomed overhead, massively enclosing its secrets, impregnable with wealth and power, forbidding him even to question it. His heart was bursting. The well known excitement of hooking a fish had led Samuel Thorp somewhat further than he meant to go. The excitement was still influencing him, and he added:

"I thought maybe you had a little hand in that party, Louis. She was covered up with a man's coat. I thought maybe it was your coat; but I sort of remember now that it was Ted Pennell's."

The effect was startling to Cousin Sam. Louis whirled to face him, snatched the cap from his head, flung it furiously to the ground, and clutched a hand in his tow hair. He was glaring and it struck Sam — the impact jarring his nervous system like a blow from a hammer — that he was on the point of committing a murderous assault, Cousin Sam's mouth opened, his under lip hanging pendulously. But just then he saw Mr. Lester Hilton up on the roadway and a prompt instinct of self-preservation moved him to call out, "Good-morning, Mr. Hilton."

Whereupon Louis snatched up his cap and ran away.



IV

TWO MEN HEAR A STORY

SAMUEL THORP suffered a strong shock of fear in the moment when it seemed that Louis might be about to commit an assault upon him. His mind was agitated by that shock as he looked up, loose-lipped, at Lester Hilton on the roadway above. But the cause of his fear — Louis — had rapidly disappeared, and his self-respect began taking revenge for the injury that had been done it, as he walked up the incline toward Hilton who seemed to be rather waiting for some explanation of the scene he had witnessed.

In his quality of American citizen with independent means — and a reckless blade, too — Sam held Louis in considerable contempt, both as a servant and a foreigner. Foreigners, whom he classified as Dutch, Dagoes, Pollocks, Hunkies and Yuts, suffered a common inferiority in Sam's estimation.

"That sure jarred him," Sam observed to Hilton, as though the jarring reflected some merit on himself. "Sort of give him the gaff right under the fifth rib."

He was somewhat uneasy in the presence of this other independent American citizen, whose trig

clothing and residence in New York suggested that he might be even a more reckless blade and gayer sport than Sam himself. He wasn't sure just how far Hilton would accept the true equality between them, and he moderated his humorous accentricities of speech somewhat.

"I was tellin' him," Sam continued, with a sociable grin, "that his girl was stewed down there in the laundry. It sure jarred him." Naturally, he wanted Hilton to accept him in true equality; this was an opportunity to make an impression in a desirable quarter; so he continued, "It was Katey; a Pollock, I guess — a maid here — and a very likely-looking piece of calico. Maybe you remember her?"

"Yes, I remember her," said Hilton — partly just amused at this native specimen.

That encouraged Sam to go on: "Right good to look upon was Katey. I guess by all accounts Louis was some stuck on her. The word was that Katey quit — telephoned or something, 'long about three o'clock Thursday afternoon. But along about five or half past I happened to see her laid out in the laundry." His pale eyes, one with a cast in it, examined Hilton's face uneasily a moment, and he added, "Stewed, I guess — or maybe doped. I was tellin' Louis about it. It sure jarred him. . . . I was tellin' him there was a man's coat thrown over her."

Hilton found himself interested otherwise than

by way of amusement, and asked, "Whose coat was it?"

Sam gave him a very wise grin and this cryptic answer, "I'm guessin' that probably a young man who answers to the name of Pennell could tell you whose coat that was if he put his mind to it."

Hilton had the measure of the man who was talking to him — a measure easily taken. Also he had an idea of himself as a gentleman who should hardly be talking household scandal with such a person. But he was very decidedly interested, and asked, "Did you see the coat?"

And Sam Thorp then perceived that his uneasiness had been without cause; this sport from New York was taking him as an equal. So he expanded, and replied promptly:

"Sure I saw it. It was young Pennell's. He had the girl out with him the night before. Anyway," he corrected with an unwonted scruple, "I saw him fetchin' her back here to the house in his car that morning." He grinned broadly and wisely as he added, "Colts will be colts — and fillies will be fillies."

The grin somehow embraced Lester Hilton in a fellowship which he resented — perhaps without due cause. So to speak, he resumed his state, gave Citizen Thorp a cool look and walked away toward the house.

With a touch of natural indignation Citizen Thorp took his revenge by thinking, "Wonder if

that stiff's got as much money as he lets on to have?" It comforted him to doubt it. All the same he was disturbed, for it then occurred to him that very likely he had been talking imprudently. He affected a complete indifference to, and independence of, the master of Overlook. Several times he had given Cousin Jim this patriotic advice: "If Judge Crane don't like it, tell him to go to hell." But he really had a rather lively sense of the power which that name connoted. It struck him now that he had been talking recklessly and with that idea in mind he immediately left the seat of power which he might have offended — not really hurrying, but just walking straight along until he gained the public road on the western confines of the Judge's grounds, where he took the trolley to Windham.

That village of three or four thousand inhabitants was his native place in which nearly his whole life had been spent, and familiar to him as his own hand. Its main street, stragglingly lined on either side with modest shops of all sorts, wound in an irregular curve, hugging the northerly and westerly shore of the bay. The buildings were mainly of wood, one or two stories high — here and there with a marked colonial touch — but the brick structure of the First National Bank towered four stories above the basement.

Sam could have told off the history of most of the shops and shopkeepers. Although many sum-

mer residents came to Windham to shop and a procession of foreign cars rolled along Main Street, nearly every third person he met on the thoroughfare was a neighbor. To some of the less fortunate of these neighbours Samuel Thorp, as a young man of independent means and sporty character, was an object of admiration and envy. In that secure, familiar atmosphere Sam rapidly expanded and figuratively defied Judge Orane to browbeat him.

But he had said a good deal. Both defiance and self-protection urged him to a further step in this affair which was so strange that he could hardly talk about it. Besides, he still had his consuming curiosity. Presently therefore he strolled on down Main street, his straw hat to one side and swinging a bamboo stick, until he came opposite a one-story brick shop, of no architectural pretensions, with a wooden awning extending over the worn and narrow stone sidewalk in front. The winding street was narrow also and from his station on the other side Sam had a very good view of the premises. Each broad plate glass window bore the simple sign, "Bloomfield, Undertaker." In one window a small white coffin was displayed for the attraction of trade. The other held some potted plants.

So far as Sam could make out there were no customers in the shop. Feeling satisfied as to that he crossed the street, but just as he gained the opposite sidewalk Mr. Bloomfield appeared in the doorway, glancing out — a small, lean man with a

thin red beard and very red face. In view of his leanness, his dryness and — perhaps — of his occupation that redness always struck strangers as something unexpected and mysteriously out of place. It struck Sam forbiddingly now — familiar as he was with it.

“Howdy, neighbour!” he said genially.

Mr. Bloomfield turned a fishy eye upon him, nodded curtly and retired into the shop; and Sam walked away — disappointed. He had meant to engage Mr. Bloomfield in conversation and extract some valuable information from him; but he felt that the crusty undertaker might be a difficult subject, so he had been somewhat prepared for a disappointment.

There was another chance, however. From Main Street several narrow thoroughfares — unpopular with chaffeurs — led steeply up to Hill Street, which was second class in a business way and, indeed, in good part given over to residences. Up there Sam turned to a ramshackle establishment whose sign announced William Furness & Son, Furniture and Undertaking. In one way it was much less promising than Mr. Bloomfield’s more fashionable concern; but in another way more promising because Sam, so to speak, was quite at home in it.

It was the furniture that was in evidence as one stepped in, the undertaking wares being relegated to the rear. William Furness Senior was industriously exhibiting bedsteads to two women;

but William Furness Junior was at leisure at the moment, and Sam at once disclosed their relationship by inquiring:

"How's your corporosity segashiatin' today, William?" Calling him by his full name instead of by a nickname was part of the joke.

"I'm first rate," the young man replied, accepting the joke but lacking Sam Thorp's gift of humour for a proper reply.

"Layin' many of 'em away now, William — at so much per lay?" Sam asked, sociably.

Furness confessed that trade in that line was dull at the moment; but Sam humourously stuck to the subject and in a moment Furness was recalling an incident which a humourous man might appreciate:

"A guy bought a coffin in here yesterday. He's somebody that lives around here. I've seen him, but I don't know who he is. He said never mind his name. He said a maid had died at his house and he was going to bury her himself to save expense. He picked out a cheap coffin, too. All we got out of it was nine dollars profit on the coffin. Took it away with him in a truck. Looked to me like Judge Crane's truck — maroon colour, you know. Probably he borrowed it of the Judge. He was a tight-wad, all right."

"What sort of a lookin' guy was he?" Sam asked, his pale eyes popping with interest.

"Sort of dish-faced man," Furness replied;

"nose like a nubbin, with red and gray whiskers parted this way." He thrust the fingers of both hands against his chin and jerked them outward as though he were combing a beard that was parted in the middle. "I've seen him round here, but I don't know who he is."

Sam had time to ask several more questions regarding the bearded guy's behaviour when the intrusion of a prospective customer cut short the conversation. But at that Sam went out enormously satisfied, for he knew — by name and appearance, at least, — a dish-faced man with a nubbin nose whose red-and-grey whiskers were parted in the middle. For Samuel Thorp it had been some day's work! Moving away from the modest furniture and undertaking shop he was fairly astonished at his own stature — as though he had looked up and discovered himself to be twenty feet high. He paused to get a cigarette from the treasured case and light it, and then, in a large self-possession, strolled down to Main Street. . . .

On turning away from loquacious Citizen Thorp, with a cool look, and entering Overlook House by the west door, Lester Hilton also had a mind full. Time was when his only feeling toward young Pennell had been one of friendly indulgence. But it seemed he could no longer feel that way toward any one. It was always in the back of his mind that this brutal trouble which had him in its grip was a sort of monstrous injustice, because he had

the ability which entitled a man to some luck and luck had hit him one blow after another while showering favours on people who didn't deserve them at all. In that way he had come around to hating his senior partner — Ted's father — quite cordially, and now that he thought of it he quite hated Ted also, as another blockhead on whom Fortune persisted in smiling. It was fairly like seeing the woman one loved lavish her favours on an altogether inferior rival.

But the strange story he had just heard in such convincing detail might in some sort redress the balance. A man who is pelted from all sides must throw up such defence as he can find. He found his wife and straightened out the thoughtful furrow in his brows to assume a light and casual air.

"I hear that pretty maid — Katey, I think her name is — has gone away," he remarked, smiling.

"So Anne said," his wife replied, mildly surprised at such an observation from him. "Why?"

Hilton laughed. "Afraid I spoiled the third act of a thrilling drama. A couple of chaps out here — hostlers or gardeners, I suppose — seemed to be at the point of going to the mat over Katey's charms when I blundered up and ruined the scene. I think one was accusing the other of sequestering Katey — Svengali to her Trilby, maybe. When did the girl go away?"

"Why Anne said something about it yesterday," Mrs. Hilton replied. "It seems Katey telephoned

to Benjamin the day before that she wasn't coming back, and asked him to keep her clothes until she sent for them. Anne was disturbed about it, and vexed at Benjamin for not finding out where the girl was when she telephoned. Anne's rather afraid the girl may have done something foolish; but I told her I didn't know what she could do about it if the girl had decided to leave — foolish or not."

Hilton smiled as though the scene he had just witnessed still amused him, and with that amused air said, "Find out what time it was that she telephoned, will you? Ask Benjamin. I want to know."

"Why, yes, I can ask him," his wife replied — not seeing why her husband's amusement should lead him to that length, but not caring.

Hilton dropped the subject then and soon took himself away; for there was another subject that his wife wanted to talk about and he did not. Momentous as that subject was, there was no use talking it over with her, for she really couldn't understand.

But he wanted to be sure when Katey had telephoned that she wasn't coming back, or when Benjamin said that she had telephoned. If Benjamin said that it was about three o'clock and Katey lay in the laundry, drunk or drugged, with Ted Pennell's coat over her more than two hours later, that would quite likely mean something of rather large propor-

tions. A man pelted from all sides must throw up what defences he can.

He had never heard anything about Ted Pennell which especially pointed in the same direction as this shadowy finger. The young man had not finished college—for reasons that could give little satisfaction to a judicious guardian, although young Pennell himself frankly laughed over them. After that failure he had been sent to California to learn the oil business. Hilton didn't know how much oil business he had learned, but surmised it was not much. Out there he had discovered compelling reasons why a trip to the Orient was indispensable to a proper understanding of the oil business and those reasons had been imposed upon a fatuous father sufficiently, at least, to win his consent. Hilton learned afterwards that Mrs. Loughman and her daughter Peggy had taken a trip to the Orient at the same time.

In April young Pennell had come on to New York to learn the investment business in the office of Pennell, Hilton & Company, and Hilton had a quite exact idea as to how much investment business he had really learned. In June Mrs. Loughman and her daughter came up here to the seashore for the summer. After suffering two weeks' separation, young Pennell had decided to take his hard-earned vacation early in the season and had come to Overlook with his aunt and her husband Judge Crane.

So there was a record of laziness, aimlessness and self-indulgence — all tolerated by a foolish father. With that record — given an astonishingly pretty and careless maid named Katey — Hilton considered that the matter fairly explained itself, taking for granted that it was as scandalous as Samuel Thorp's story had suggested.

And not long after that young Pennell took a foremost place in the mind of another person — namely, Danforth Crane. He and Lester Hilton had left Overlook House almost together, but at once separated by mutual inclination, Danforth Crane turning southward and toward the woods. This only child of the master of Overlook was then thirty-six years old and two or three inches shorter than his father, but carrying more flesh, his fuller face bearing no strongly marked wrinkles. It was rugged and big-featured like the Judge's face, yet the resemblance between them was by no means close. Danforth was swarthy, the skin on the hairless areas of his face as dark as that beneath which lay the roots of his shaven beard. He wore a thick mustache, trimmed close, and his almost black hair looked stiff and intractable. Little curly black wires grew on the backs of his hands and wrists — altogether a dark man, as though he had been dipped in coal smoke. He moved and spoke deliberately — slow, sure, massive, with a coolness which seemed born of indifference to attack.

Strolling, enjoying the genial sun and salt air, he stuck off toward the garage and stables — a group of long, low grey structures in which a company of cavalry might have found accommodation. He shared his father's taste for distinguished horse-flesh; but although the ample Crane fortune would presumably one day be his he had by no means reached the stage where he was content, like his father, to indulge a taste for horses and leisure as a major occupation. His ambition started where his father's left off and he was as deeply immersed in affairs as his father had been at thirty-six. Not that he cared a great deal about having much more money; but he saw vast industrial regions — pretty nearly a whole industrial world — still to be conquered for oil; that sublimated coal, so convenient to handle, capable of such endless uses; all the ships and wheels ought to be driven by it finally. He was enlisted as a member of the Great General Staff for that conquest. Horses and Overlook could come later.

All the same he strolled around by the stables to take a look at the shiny beasts — every one a peer or peeress of the realm, with the stamp of noble breeding in sleek nervous limbs and bright eyes. Ownership of them gave one an agreeable sensation. So Danforth took a leisurely turn through the stables, listening silently to the sage comments of the grooms. There were several living rooms on the floor above the stables and garage,

inhabited by a number of servants — grooms and gardeners.

Leaving the last stable he encountered Louis, the gardener — meeting face to face on the cinder path. He noted casually that Louis looked ill; but as their eyes met the gardener's appearance became even more remarkable. The man's hands clenched and something that Danforth couldn't make out — a kind of convulsive twist — appeared on his face. It made only the most fleeting of impressions on Danforth's mind and he strolled leisurely on — having another call to make that morning. His course still led southward and he struck off through the woods, going down a steep, sweet, ferny little valley and ponderously up the other side. The brief climb reminded him that he wasn't keeping as fit as he should for it made his breath come short.

He paused at the top of the ascent and turned to look back in order to get a better measure of the climb. Then he saw that Louis the gardener was following him — at least it looked like following him; stalking him through the woods as a hunter stalks game. Now if anybody were stalking him anywhere Danforth's instincts immediately told him what to do — namely just stand still and let the stalker come up with him. Dodging was never his way. So he stood in his tracks, wondering a little. He and Louis were old friends in a way.

There was no finesse about Danforth. They said down in Wall Street that he was a man to be taken

carefully into account, always; but he left finesse to those who might need it. Through a sort of law of gravitation, lighter objects in the neighbourhood helplessly fell toward his mass. So now the distraught gardener gravitated to him — his mind in a tumult and only half understanding why he was going. Gaining the top of the ascent, level with Danforth, he could only gape at the dark man in a dumb, tormented appeal.

"Something on your mind, Louis?" Danforth inquired coolly.

Louis' brawny hand began mechanically picking at the bark of a tree. He couldn't get his eyes up to Danforth's face, as he muttered, "Men with no money and pull will have plenty on their minds." But the mass drew him.

"Somebody not been using you right?" Danforth suggested, tolerantly.

"Somebody aint been using somebody else right," said Louis in an uncertain voice, picking at the bark. Still the other man's mass drew him; the jealousy and sense of outrage in his breast boiled forth:

"There's a maid here, Mr. Danforth — a Polish maid — Katey. She's gone away!" There was poignancy in that exclamation like a cry for the dead. Obscurely he had faith in the heavy man opposite him, and in a mechanical token of fealty took off his cap. "Nobody seen her at the house since Thursday. Benjamin has locked up her room.

He says she telephoned she was going away. At three o'clock he says she telephoned."

Glaring palely he rushed on, "Five o'clock she was in the laundry lying on some clothes. Drunk, that Sam Thorp says she was. Katey don't drink, ever. Sometimes when there's beer she takes a sip — half a glass. She don't drink, ever!" He struck his breast with a mighty fist. "It is not drink, Mr. Danforth. . . . Rich people, with a pull, they do anything they please. It is Mr. Ted. He knows. He had her somewhere with him in his car. He brought her back to the house. It is not drink. It is drugs."

In his mind he saw Katey lying senseless — a sweet figure — with the great house sitting above her, forbidding. He cried, "A poor little maid — what does he care?" A sudden spurt of tears dimmed his glaring eyes and his voice broke.

"I take it up myself! I take him by the throat! But what do I know? How can I find out anything? Where is she? What they do with her? I come to you. You are a square man. I want to know what is become of Katey." Not knowing what he was about, but with a vague half-ashamed feeling that there were tears on his cheeks, he began feeling in his pockets for a handkerchief. Not finding one he wiped his cheeks on the back of his band. "I got to know! I think I come to you first!"

Danforth had listened to this tempestuous and

disconnected statement with astonishment. He remembered the maid Louis was speaking of.

"Why do you think Ted had an hand in it?" he asked after a moment. In that moment he had seemed to be telling Louis to compose himself — like a restraining hand on an excited person's arm.

"He is rich," Louis replied, as though that explained much. "He has money to spend. He's been meeting her at dances — he takes her riding." Louis had heard all about the dance. Lena had taken care that he should hear. "He had her somewhere in his car that morning . . . Katey never drinks!" he affirmed again, in a passionate outburst. "It's something bad! . . . In the laundry there — when she was senseless — his coat was over her. Sam Thorp saw it."

It was Danforth's habit to permit himself a little pause before speaking. He followed the habit now, and asked, "Who is Sam Thorp?"

"He's a cousin of the furnace-man, Jim Thorp," Louis replied, adding, "a loafer. But he says he saw her there — he pointed out the place. He peeked through the transom." He choked up a bit. "It sounds true, Mr. Danforth. Where would Katey be? She promised to go with me that Thursday evening. We're going to the theatre at Windham. I had the tickets. I waited for her where she said, but she didn't come. Always Katey comes when she promises. Where would she be? Ben-

jamin says she telephoned, but she didn't take her clothes."

His emotion, quelled by Danforth's mass, was rising again. "It's something bad, Mr. Danforth! I come to you first. I think you do right by a poor man — and a poor maid! Somebody is got to do right! I don't think you like such things of using a maid that way. Let him take one of his own girls, that's rich, too, and got strong friends! I can't stand that, Mr. Danforth! Me—I don't want to kill nobody! I don't want to make trouble in the house where I work."

He couldn't very well express the powerful conflict of emotions and reasons that had been pulling him of late.

"I decide I come to you first. I have confidence in you. You do right by me, Mr. Danforth. I must know where Katey is gone — what is happened to her. She don't ever drink. If you do right by us, I wait for you."

Danforth perceived that it was an honourable and loyal offer. He was even pleased by Louis' trust in him.

"This is all news to me, Louis," he said. "I will look into it. Certainly I don't want Katey misused in my father's house — or anywhere else. But this man who told you — what did you say his name is?"

"Sam Thorp," Louis repeated. "He is a cousin

of the furnace man. He comes around here all the time."

"He may have been just lying," Danforth replied. "Or he may have been mistaken. . . . I will find out. . . . And there's no use talking about it to anybody until we know what's happened."

"No," Louis assented.

"Talking wouldn't do Katey any good — if there's nothing in it — or anybody else," Danforth reminded him. "So say no more about it. Leave it to me."

That implied a promise and Louis muttered, "Thank you, Mr. Danforth; I leave it to you."

"No more talking then until we find out," Danforth repeated, coolly, and waited for the gardener to take himself away.

Louis understood that and said again, "I wait for you." Putting on his cap he went down into the ravine, returning to the garage by the way he had come.

Danforth watched his descending figure for a moment, and turned away, his mind occupied by the strange story he had just heard. He had more or less an open mind about it. The fellow who told — Sam Thorp, he must remember that name — might have been lying or mistaken. And Louis with the delusion common to lovers, might be mistaken about Katey's familiarity with alcoholic beverages. But

in that case, why the statement from Benjamin that she had telephoned around three o'clock that she wasn't coming back? In any event it was something to be looked into.

He was not prepared to believe Louis' suggestion of a drug; but short of that he was ready enough to believe almost anything, for his confidence in Ted Pennell was slight. Lazy, self-indulgent, undisciplined, spoiled, with no notable intellectual powers — about so Ted Pennell stood in Danforth's mind. When a man past twenty-three, or nearing twenty-four, so stands in one's mind, one is prepared to believe many things.

Pondering, he moved on leisurely in the direction which he had had in mind when he left the stables — that is, southerly — until he came to another height at the edge of the woods from which he looked down on three or four acres of lawn, shrubbery and garden with a dwelling in the midst. The dwelling was, perhaps, a quarter the prodigal size of Overlook House, with a red tile roof, the arched door and windows in its grey stucco walls outlined in vermillion; altogether a smarter and gayer structure than Overlook, one on which the architect had exercised his fancy more freely than the high style of the Judge's house permitted. Here lived Mrs. Judith Loughman and her daughter Elizabeth, or Peggy. There was Mrs. Loughman now, puttering in the flower garden — or, rather, supervising the puttering of a gardener. That along with au-

tomobile rides, constituted her idea of out-of-door country life.

Danforth had meant to call at Mrs. Loughman's that morning. He saw her comfortable figure in the garden. But the view from that point dropped downward to the sea, and a moment after seeing Mrs. Loughman he saw two bareheaded figures strolling along the rock-rim of the shore in the direction of the coffee pot. One wore a blue silk sweater over a white dress and showed a crown of tawny hair. The other wore a brown flannel shirt, open at the neck, with tumbled hair only two shades darker than the girl's. They walked slowly and were evidently engaged in conversation. It struck Danforth, from that distance, that Peggy was doing most of the talking. . . .

Two figures of youth — one of them, to Danforth, like a chord of music or the fragrance of a rose; the other one, quite otherwise. While Peggy talked — as it seemed to Danforth — Ted Pennell stooped lithely down and picked up a round stone the size of a baseball. With a little toss he adjusted it in the palm of his hand; then drew himself up, with coiled muscles, and hurled the stone far into the sea. It was a splendid throw; any baseball captain would have admired it. And having seen how far out it lit, Ted thrust his hands in his trousers' pockets and continued to walk, listening to Peggy with bent head. That struck Danforth as finely typical; the young man down there

possessed admirable strength and agility — to throw stones into the sea. More or less that struck Danforth as about what he was good for.

All the same they were both figures of youth. Their smooth cheeks flew the same flag. Their nervous limbs moved in a certain unison; one could catch a rhythm that was always breaking out. Danforth understood that very well — having often noted it of late. Foregoing the intended call, he turned his own heavy figure right about in its tracks and plodded back toward the stables. That springy rhythm was no longer in his ponderous limbs; but he was making an industrial empire; he had practised strength which was otherwise engaged than in throwing stones into the sea. Could a girl understand that?

. . . Especially if it should turn out that the stone-thrower had played the dog to a helpless little parlour maid?

Pondering that Danforth strolled back through the woods.



V

ANOTHER DISAPPEARANCE

TED PENNELL was entertaining some strangers. They were relatives. Their name was Trouble. Of course he had been acquainted with Trouble before — many times — but only a casual sort of acquaintance, undergone with a certain lightness because of a feeling that the visitor would soon depart. But this time the visitors had snuggled up close, as though they meant to stay indefinitely — biting at his heart and filling him with a woeful depression.

That showed more or less in his face and manner, when he strolled along the seashore that Saturday talking with Peggy Loughman — as Danforth Crane had observed them from the high ground at the edge of the woods to the north of Mrs. Loughman's house.

"Why, there's nothing at all in that Katey business, Peggy," he was saying, with a troubled earnestness. "It's just as I told you before. Billy Harlow and Chet Beals and I happened to be driving by that evening. We saw that dance pavilion on the beach — up toward Stony Cove. We went in just for greens. I saw Katey there and danced with her a few times. I've run across her half a

dozen other places — down on the beach a couple of times, maybe, and so on. . . . I didn't think you'd be the girl, Peg, to raise a row because a man was just decent to a servant."

The girl's flowery cheeks flushed slightly and a tiny light glinted in her dark grey eyes. She might have answered that with a counter-thrust; but she had resolved otherwise today, and replied reasonably, "Being decent to a servant has nothing to do with it, Ted. . . . I don't like Chester Beals."

"Well, I don't know's I'm infatuated with him myself," he answered, unhappily. He was aware that various people shared the prejudice she had mentioned; well aware, also that there was considerable ground for it. But in a general way and by mere reason of sex he felt bound to defend the accused. "He's a good fellow, and good company."

"He's older than you and Billy Harlow — twenty-nine or thirty," Peggy went on.

So there was the insinuation — intolerable to any self-respecting male, of being led astray by an older person. He could only smile and reply, "I've been taking solid food for quite a while, Peggy."

But she was not to be put off with a jest, for she had her own trouble. Her grey eyes looked at him gravely; a little droop came at the corners of her lips. "I saw him myself one evening with Katey in his car," she said in a slightly lower

tone. "I hated him for it. Say what you please — that it's only a little amusement and there's no harm in it and all that. She is a maid. It isn't fine — it isn't nice — it isn't even decent. . . . I couldn't bear it from you."

She looked so grave and sweet, that he could only blurt, "Why, Peggy, you know there's nobody in the world I care a whoop for except you!" As her loveliness filled his eyes and another figure contrasted itself with her in his mind, he blurted again, "That maid! Why, Lord, Peg, you must think I'm crazy! You've known me half my life. You ought to know me!"

She then felt that she did know him — a warm-hearted, good-minded, loyal blunderhead of a boy who had never really grown up. "I do know you," she said. "I know you're careless, Ted. But you mustn't be — ever! — in a case like this."

She was tremendously earnest about that — a kind of breathless, life or death earnestness. He loved Peggy completely, without a reservation in his mind as to the fact that she was the only girl in the world, of whom he was not in the least worthy. But — well, these fits of hers of being so tremendously in earnest and taking things with such deadly seriousness! He realized, with humility, that they proceeded from the fineness of her character; but he found them rather baffling at times, this being one of the times.

It was baffling now, in part, because he was trou-

bled a great deal in respect of Katey and he couldn't frankly tell her that trouble. She wouldn't understand it properly.

"I don't want to be careless, Peggy," he said, walking on and looking down. "For your sake, I don't want to be."

At best that was a blunderheaded, helpless sort of penitence, and not especially promising. He felt that himself, and saw a round stone like a baseball and picked it up and hurled it into the sea; and was immediately ashamed of himself for that foolish action.

"I know I've been lazy," he went on. "I've never done a real honest lick of work in my life. I know that's not right. I'll be twenty-four years old this fall. I'm not a bit satisfied with myself, Peg. I know I ought to find a real job and go at it like a grown-up person. And I'm going to do it, too."

He claimed no merit for the resolution — as though he did not ask her to believe it until she had the proof — and verbally she gave him no merit, for she had made up her mind to plain speaking. But she spoke so gently that it was like the fond touch of a hand:

"It's true you ought to, Ted. I think your father is more to blame than you are, for anybody can get more fun out of playing than working. But playing around all the time isn't good. I

don't think you're lazy, but I think you will be if you don't go at something in earnest."

"I'm going to," he replied with conviction. "I've been thinking about it. I'm going to stay here over the Fourth of July and then I'm going back to the office and really go to work."

That sounded final. She slipped her hand into his, and after a moment confessed, "I'll hate to see you go; but I know you ought to."

Quite reconciled and in harmony, it seemed, they turned aside to round the heap of tumbled stone that screened the coffee pot and slipped down through the crevice in the granite to the pot's brim. It was still raging mightily and the spell of its tumultuous energy caught their healthy nerves at once. Ted stepped to the very brim, looking down on the seething water with the old foolish fascination of wanting to pit his skill and muscle against it. He watched the currents a moment, grinned and raised his voice so that Peggy could hear it above the roar:

"Never will be satisfied till I see whether I can swim across!"

She put her hand under his arm and drew him away; but the subtle excitement was in her blood, too.

"I'm going bathing tomorrow," she said when they had got around the rock screen, which dulled the roar.

He laughed and replied, "Bet you put it off!"

The sea water up there was icy cold all summer. She dreaded the first plunge — and had been putting it off, to his amusement.

"No," she replied, "tomorrow — if it's fair. You call for me with the water wagon at eleven o'clock."

They found it more convenient to put on their bathing suits at home and ride down to the beach, returning wrapped in water-proofs. But in spite of the wrappings the return journey was sure to be somewhat sloppy, so an old closed car in Judge Crane's garage was set aside for that purpose. They called it the water wagon.

"I'll be there," said Ted; and that subject also was settled. All subjects between them seemed to be happily settled and after strolling a little further they sat down on a rock overlooking the sea. But all this while — such are the mysteries of feminine psychology — earnest Peggy had had something on her mind that she meant to speak about. She presently led around to it:

"At any rate I'd like to know where Katey is."

"Oh, she's all right," Ted replied, looking away, and in the tone of a person who wishes to drop a subject — for he also had something on his mind, which, unlike Peggy, he didn't mean to mention.

"Why do you think so?" Peggy asked, her eyes upon his face.

But his eyes avoided her and his tone was not

satisfactory as he replied, "Why wouldn't she be?"

"You haven't heard anything about her?"

"Not a word," Ted replied, and stooped to pick up a pebble and shy it off into the water. Sometimes he acted that way when his mind was disturbed.

A little pause; then, "Where was she Thursday morning?"

Ted looked around then, saying, "Thursday morning? I've no idea. I didn't see her all day Thursday — that I remember."

Peggy was looking straight at him, and said, "Thursday morning, Ted — about noon."

"Why, no!" he affirmed. "I've no idea where she was. I didn't see her."

The grey eyes that held his seemed to grow darker and Peggy said, "Thursday about noon — in your car."

"Why, no!" he repeated. "I didn't see her at all Thursday. She wasn't in my car."

"Oh, Ted!" Peggy moaned, with a deep hurt. "Why do you tell me that?"

"Because it's true," he declared, astonished at her persistence.

She burst forth passionately, "It isn't true! I saw her myself in your car with you. Mother saw you, too. We were hardly two rods behind you at one time. We both saw you!"

And then unlucky Ted recalled the events of

Thursday morning when a woman in Katey's coat and hat sat beside him in his car. But he was in honour bound, and much confused to boot. So he muttered foolishly, "Well — say she was with me."

"But why did you tell me she wasn't?" Peggy accused, hurt through and through.

"I forgot," the unlucky young man muttered again.

But that was almost worse than before. "You couldn't have forgotten!" she cried. Indeed her wound rankled. "You didn't tell me the truth! You didn't tell me the truth!" she exclaimed.

And in Ted's confusion and humiliation he was thinking that a man with anything on his shoulders except a pumpkin would have remembered that Edith Hilton was in his car, wearing Katey's cloak, and so have avoided blundering into such a mess.

"Well — say I didn't," he replied stupidly.

"You're not telling me the truth now! You know where she is!" Peggy accused.

Ted hung his head a moment and answered dully, "What's the use of my telling you anything, Peg — if I'm a liar?"

"What is the use?" she retorted.

At which Ted got up and walked away toward Overlook House, a great woe in his mind — and some resentment. He might be lazy and careless and selfish and aimless; but he really didn't deserve this!

So plodding, with a heavy and uncertain mind,

he reached Overlook House. Two morning newspapers from Boston had been delivered and lay on the hall table. Gloomily and absently he picked them up and stepped into the big room called the library where he settled himself in a chair — uncertain as to what else to do at the moment — and mechanically addressed himself to the newspapers. He gave a casual glance at the headlines on the first page, in the act of turning the page over; and without even a glance turned on through the barren areas of politics, commerce, labour and like dead matter — especially past the waste area of the editorial page — until he came to the part of the paper which justified its publication, namely, the sporting pages. Those he proceeded to read, with ripe wisdom and keen appreciation of the values therein expressed. Many other readers skipped the sporting pages which were so much Greek to them. But he was young, superabundantly healthy, with no need to worry over income and outgo. Who won an election or a strike was a fact of much less signification in his life than who won a tennis match.

All the same he read with a divided mind — the cloud lowering. Presently he was aware of Benjamin puttering over something at the other end of the room. Across that distance he now and then regarded Benjamin out of the corner of his eye. The stout, sealed-up butler, with a little patch of grey whisker in front of each ear, the ear itself em-

bedded in flesh, and with dignity in his double chin became to Ted a figure of temptation. Presently he laid aside the paper, sauntered down the room, glanced out of a wide, many-paned window toward the sea, lit a cigarette. Then with an elaborate casualness he strolled over to the butler.

"Benjamin, what time was it Katey telephoned she wasn't coming back?" he asked.

The butler ceased his task of arranging some flowers in a vase, straightened from his slightly stooping posture and looked the young man in the face for a moment. The brain seemed to be active behind his small twinkling eyes; there seemed something like a hint of resentment on his broad, parchment face. But after the moment he replied, automatically:

"About three o'clock, sir."

"You haven't heard anything from her since?"

"No, sir."

A pause, and Ted asked, "Has any mail come here to the house for her?"

"There are two or three letters, I think."

"You haven't any address to forward them to?"

"No, sir."

"Her clothes are still here?"

"Yes, sir."

Again there was a pause; then Ted remarked, "I see," and walked out on the terrace.

Benjamin looked after him a moment, and compressed his lips and resumed his task. But be-

fore he had finished the task Ted re-entered the room hurriedly, some ill-suppressed excitement visible in his manner. Striding up to the butler he said peremptorily, "Benjamin, I want to look in Katey's room. Take me up there."

It was a command; but Benjamin hesitated over it a long moment, his eyes twinkling at the young man and his face impassive except that his lips were slightly compressed. Then he replied, "Very well, sir; I'll get the key."

But he turned to give a finishing touch to the flowers and in his broad back Ted seemed to read a sort of obstinacy, as though he might be waiting for some explanation or justification of the command. Ted kept quite still, however, and in a moment Benjamin went pudgily from the room. Ted followed a little after him and waited in the hall, for they would no doubt go up that way; and his nerves were on edge, lest some one to whom an explanation might be due should step in. No one did step in, however, and soon Benjamin reappeared — with a little gesture inviting Ted to go up the stairs.

They went up to the third story. There Benjamin unlocked a door and stood aside, with a little butlerish bow, for Ted to enter. Stepping through the doorway Ted found himself in a neat, sunny bedroom, simply but sufficiently furnished — Katey's room, of course. He noted that the room was in some disorder and the bed was not made up, as

though the key had been turned upon it just as the maid had left it. The key was sticking in the lock; Benjamin was standing impassively just inside the room.

Ted took the key out of the lock and dropped it in his coat pocket and addressed the butler: "You needn't wait. I'll lock the door and bring the key down to you when I'm through."

It was a command, but again the butler waited a long moment, his eyes twinkling and his lips compressed. Then he said, "Very well, sir."

As he went out of the room, Ted closed the door after him. Pausing in the hall and listening, Benjamin heard the key turn in the lock. Evidently the young man was locking himself in the maid's room to remain for some time. Benjamin then sought his master.

Quite a company assembled at Overlook House, informally, for dinner that evening — Judge Crane and his wife, of course, and Danforth Crane and Mr. and Mrs. Lester Hilton. Mrs. Loughman and daughter were there and Dr. Bradford McKeon and his wife. The eminent specialist was what is commonly called dish-faced, with a nubbin nose. His red and grey whiskers were parted in the middle and combed stiffly outward from the chin. An exasperated lady had once called him a "super-cilious icicle." Usually there was in his manner the frost of exclusiveness and intellectual pride. He frankly cared only for people who were well

worth caring for. His geneological line missed the *Mayflower* by only a score of years and while the family had missed a good many things since then — sometimes even a comfortable habitation — his attitude was decidedly aristocratic. His wife was taller than himself, with energy and character in her thin face; altogether one might call them a pair to get on or know the reason why. They were the last of the company to arrive, just at the dinner hour.

Mrs. Loughman and daughter came a good half hour earlier walking over, bareheaded, along the sea. As they stepped through the broad open door into the hall Danforth Crane was standing there talking to his stepmother and Mrs. Hilton. Peggy's mind was distressed and if she had been Ted Pennell her manner would have showed it. But she was a woman and if she had had no other schooling her woman's instinct would have taught her to look pleasant in company, however she felt. At sight of Danforth her face lighted. She glided swiftly toward him, smiling and holding out both hands.

"Why haven't you been over to see me, Dan?" she laughed. "That isn't nice of you!" The sweet tilt of her voice rang in his ears. She slipped both hands into his, raised herself on tip toe and kissed him.

She loved Danforth Crane tremendously, and had ever since she could remember. By some in-

scrutable process of selection she had given him a preference at the age of three or four, when one has no compunctions about showing one's preference. Often she had cuddled her small joys and sorrows in his lap. Later on, when she could understand it, it seemed strange to her that the Loughmans and the Cranes, living next door to each other and always running back and forth, were not relatives but only friends. That discovery made no difference in her feelings toward them. All her life Danforth had been a sort of uncle or big brother; she had been kissing him as naturally as she drew breath.

"I did walk over that way, Peggy," said Danforth with a smile; "but I saw you were entertaining other company—down by the shore—and I had some letters to write."

"But you're going to stay a while?" she asked, keeping a hand in his.

"I think I shall stay over next week," he replied.

"Fine!" she cried, shining up at him. "Will you go bathing with me tomorrow? I'm going to start the shiver season then—tomorrow morning. Will you?"

"Be glad to," he said.

"Remember, then!" she warned. "Eleven o'clock tomorrow. We'll come for you in the water wagon, Ted and I. No backing out!"

He and Peggy talked a moment longer; then he

noticed that Edith Hilton was regarding them and he thought there was a look of understanding — perhaps rather a mocking look — in her dark, intelligent eyes. He turned to Mrs. Loughman.

Presently Dr. and Mrs. McKeon arrived and the company went in to dinner. Danforth thought Peggy had been furtively looking for some one and when they sat down to the table — every place taken and no vacant chair — he thought there was a faint surprise and troubled questioning in her eyes. Danforth himself had noted an absence. In a moment Mrs. Loughman noticed it, and as usual spoke her thought without hesitation, addressing the hostess:

“But where’s Ted tonight?”

“Gone to New York,” Mrs. Crane replied, smiling. “Teddy is getting very important in a business way now, it seems. His father telephoned him from New York just after luncheon; told him to come down at once. He left in a hurry.”

Every one, apparently, accepted that plausible statement. But in a moment Lester Hilton, at Peggy’s left, spoke to Danforth at her right:

“Here’s a wire that may interest you, Dan. It came half an hour ago.” He took the yellow envelope from the pocket of his dinner coat, where he had thrust it, and handed it to Peggy, who passed it on to Danforth. Danforth drew out the message, of considerable length, glanced over it, replaced it in the envelope and handed it back. For

the barest instant the two men looked at each other — a knowing look as though some secret communication passed silently between them. There seemed to be a satirical grin in Lester Hilton's eyes. Peggy's eyes fell to her plate; she felt forlorn.

The dinner party in general proceeded in a subdued tone, for they were all aware of a cause for anxiety much more substantial than any gossamer stuff in a girl's mind about her sweetheart. Dr. McKeon sat beside the hostess, and any one might have noticed that she looked slightly ill — noticeable shadows under her eyes and a slightly greyish hue in her face. They knew, in fact, that she hadn't been very well for several days; that baffling wrongness in her breast had given some ominous signs. They made the due effort to be gay, but Judge Crane's eyes were often travelling across the table to his wife. Dr. McKeon was spending more time than usual at the house.

The little informal party broke up early. Dr. and Mrs. McKeon went home. Mrs. Loughman had had enough walking and accepted for herself and daughter Mrs. McKeon's offer of a lift in the doctor's car. Judge Crane and his wife went upstairs. A little private conversation — continuing a talk before dinner — occurred between Mr. and Mrs. Hilton. The husband frowned and remarked irritably:

"It's all nonsense. I tell you, I know. And he wouldn't tell you the truth anyway."

His irritation and impatience struck his wife sadly, as though he had obstinately made up his mind to go his own way in any event. She thought that obstinacy was a mark of weakness.

"Oh, no, Lester," she protested. "Dan will tell me the truth if he tells me anything." And — whether he found an offensive implication in it or not — she could hardly help adding, "Lying isn't his method."

Hilton shrugged his shoulders and retorted, "Do as you please; but for God's sake be careful."

Of course, it humiliated and vexed him that she should seek another man's opinion when he had already said, "I know!" He turned away, ill-naturedly, and went back to the dining-room, where he helped himself to another cordial before going upstairs, angry with her and blaming her for setting up her judgment in opposition to his own. That left his wife alone in the great living-room — some shadows in her velvet eyes; a small and charming figure in a dainty dinner gown with all the weight of the parlous family fortunes on her smooth white shoulders. She knew perfectly well that Danforth Crane was out on the terrace, strolling alone and smoking in the night air. But when she went to the open hall door and saw him there she affected a tone of mild surprise:

"Oh, you out here, Dan? This air is sharp."

He came up to the doorway smiling, glad to have her company. He was fond of Edith Hilton and he had long since discovered that a capable mind and steady will lay behind that smooth forehead, beneath the mass of almost-black hair. "Shall I get you a wrap?" he asked, coming up to the doorway.

"I'll get one," she said, and in a moment rejoined him with a coat thrown over her bare shoulders. "Too bad about Anne," she remarked pityingly, as they started pacing along the broad terrace — aware of the moon splendidly silvering the sea down below them.

"Too bad," he repeated, sincerely. "Mamma's fine — so bright and gracious. She oughtn't to have that bad heart."

They paced a moment. She knew he did not use finesse himself, and no one else need use it in dealing with him. So, glancing up into his swarthy face with a little laugh she said, "I've a bad heart myself lately, Dan. Will you tell me something?"

"No doubt," he replied, smiling.

"I have a little money of my own that Lester doesn't know about," she explained; "only a little, but quite a lot to me. I had a tip not long ago and put my money into Hidalgo Petroleum. It's gone down ever since. Ought I to hold it?"

"Sell it, Edith; sell it," he replied promptly. "What did you pay for it?"

She hadn't asked her husband what he paid for his Hidalgo Petroleum because, a good while before this, she had made the melancholy discovery that when he was cornered there was little use in asking him questions. He would answer the questions, but whether or not he answered them truthfully just depended on the circumstances. She had formed the habit of not pressing him for answers. Nevertheless, on her own account and using her own good sense, she had been looking up Hidalgo Petroleum on the financial pages of the newspapers; so she answered Danforth's question without hesitation:

"I paid a hundred and fifty-three for it. It's only a hundred and twenty-six now."

"Too bad," said Danforth candidly. "But sell it Monday morning. It will go lower."

"I suppose so," she commented, with a little laugh. "Things generally do when I buy them. They said some Englishmen were buying it and you were buying it and it was bound to go up."

"Well, that was true enough once," he replied, casually. "Coombes was buying it and so were we. But it was silly to go on with a fight for control and send the stock over the moon. Coombes and I will fix it up between us. That's the trouble with tips, Edith. You hear that somebody did something last week, but you don't know what he's doing today. Better sell it." He was speaking in a casual manner, as of a small incident in a great

movement. After a moment he added, "Sorry you made a loss. I don't give tips myself, you know. But if I were you I would sell my Hidalgo Monday and put the money into Alpha Oil. I think you will make up your loss." Glancing down at her he warned soberly, "That's confidential, you know — even as to Lester."

"Thank you, Dan," she murmured; and felt a breath of shame for the mean rôle she was playing.

They paced silently a moment; then he said, "Tell me something. A maid here named Katey disappeared Thursday. What do you know about it?"

The question surprised her, for her husband had been asking it. "Katey?" she replied. "Why, all I know is what I heard Anne say — that the girl telephoned to Benjamin saying she wasn't coming back. Anne has been rather worried about it. . . . But, of course, the girl is of age. If she decided to leave there's nothing anybody can do. Benjamin says she telephoned about three o'clock." She had questioned the butler herself since her husband had asked her to.

The surprise which his question set up still moved her. "Why do you ask, Dan? Why does it interest you?" she said abruptly.

"It seems there is something odd about it," he replied coolly. "Why did her leaving worry mamma?"

"Why, Anne was afraid. . . . You remember the maid?"

"Yes, I remember her well," Danforth answered. "A pretty rogue."

"Exactly," said Edith. "A pretty rogue — much too pretty for her own good, perhaps. I'm afraid she was given to flirting with any presentable man that came along. Because she is so pretty — her leaving abruptly that way, you know — not even coming back for her clothes — Anne was afraid she was doing something foolish. I never thought there was any harm in Katey, but she has very little sense. It would be a shame if she had fallen into anybody's hands who would mistreat her. But she said she was going; in fact, she was gone before Anne knew anything about it. So there seemed nothing to be done. I should like to know that she is all right, and so would Anne. But why do you say there seems to be something odd about it?"

Danforth kept still a moment and then only asked another question: "Do you know why Ted Pennell cleared out this afternoon?"

The name struck her with a painful suggestion, and now she caught the significance of a remark her husband had dropped in the course of his questioning about Katey's disappearance. The shock kept her silent an instant; then she exclaimed, with reproach:

"Oh, Dan! Surely you don't imagine Ted had anything to do with Katey's disappearance?"

The reproach in her tone seemed quite lost upon him and he allowed himself the slight interval which, in his deliberate manner of speaking, commonly preceded a reply. Then he inquired coolly, "Why not?"

"You know why!" she retorted. "I admit the boy's scatter-brained and heedless enough. Probably he's lazy enough, too, when it comes to that dull grind in a Wall Street office. He doesn't take life very seriously, and why should he? About everything he's wanted has been handed to him. I'm fond of his father, but he is about the last man I should pick out to bring up a headstrong boy. He hasn't really succeeded in bringing himself up, yet. I admit Ted has been more or less spoiled. But I know him, Dan. Any such vile business as running off with a parlour maid is not in him."

There was the usual slight pause, and Danforth observed coolly, "I didn't say there was any vile business about it. I remember the girl very well. I noticed how pretty she was myself, and I'm too busy to pay much attention to pretty rogues. Besides, I couldn't afford it — at my age and with my responsibilities. But at twenty-three, with no responsibilities at all and an indulgent father to sign the checks, one can afford almost anything. I don't see anything especially vile about it."

"You're prejudiced," Edith murmured, as though saying it to herself.

"Well, so are you, Edith," he replied calmly; "like mamma and the rest of the women folk. You're all still thinking of Ted Pennell about the way he looks in that pastel in mamma's bedroom — in yellow curls and knickerbockers, his hand on the dog's head that's almost as high as himself. You know that his legs and shoulders stick out of the picture at both ends, but you think his mind and heart are just about four years old. Ted's twenty-three, you know — long past drums and hobby horses. I should say that Katey would be just about the toy for him now. Why do you suppose he cleared out this afternoon?"

"I don't know that," she murmured, half absently.

They had come back to the open door where the hall lights flooded across the brick terrace. She stopped there, looked up at him earnestly a moment and said, "Look out, Dan!"

He seemed not to understand the warning and after an instant inquired, "For what?"

"I thought you were fine, Dan," she went on, her dark eyes holding to his. "More than fine — big! You say there's nothing particularly vile about this. Not when he loves Peggy and Peggy loves him with all her heart and they're the same as engaged? A housemaid, under Peggy's very eyes? Isn't there anything vile in that? You've

been fine — and big. Don't let go now. You can't help loving her, but you can help being jealous of Ted."

The shot went home. Looking sombrely down at her, Danforth realized that if anybody at all was to discover his secret it would be just this velvet-eyed, low-voiced, graceful woman in front of him. She always understood. At various times he had rather wondered, impersonally, why — when she understood so well and he admired her so genuinely — the long friendship between them had never flamed up into a more intimate feeling. But it never had. Perhaps she understood too much. He was not abashed now by her discovery; that was rather in the nature of things.

"Why shouldn't I be jealous, then?" he asked coolly. "I'm human, too, Edith. Maybe you're by way of forgetting that as well as that Ted isn't in knickerbockers and yellow curls. If he's minded to throw the game away why must I sit still and wag my thumbs? Why shouldn't I make a stroke for myself? . . . It's true I want her a thousand times more than I've ever wanted anything else in my life. What's wrong about that?"

"What would she say to it?" the woman replied.

Against the utmost effort of his will he was compelled to feel a certain shame. Peggy had cuddled in his lap as a baby. In little white dresses, her hair tied up in a ribbon, she had run to him as

naturally as to her father. She had sat on the arm of his chair and kissed him when her toes reached the ground. She had always loved him tremendously, in that way. Why must there be shame in his wanting her to love him differently? There was a certain shame in it, which he resented as unreasonable.

"Probably it would shock her — just now," he admitted. "Probably she's never thought of me in that way. . . . But the change wouldn't be so great."

That little change! The idea of the girl — shining with grace, her presence a perfume — came upon him, suffusing his heart. His eyes appealed to the woman before him. "I'm human, too," he muttered. "If Ted gives the game away why must I sit still?"

"But he hasn't given it away," she insisted.

"Well we shall see," he replied, and drew his hand across his forehead. He evidently wished to say no more, for he stepped toward the door.

Mrs. Hilton entered the house with disquietude and alarm in her mind. She knew Danforth Crane almost too well — old, it was true, from Peggy's point of view, and heavy and dark; yet powerful and formidable; a big force indefinitely ranging itself in hostility to scatter-brained, heedless, inexperienced Ted Pennell. She felt sure Ted had nothing to do with Katey's disappearance, yet she had to shiver a little as she went upstairs.

And there she was to meet her husband, who also, as she now understood, had something about Ted Pennell on his mind. There was a great difference, however. Her husband was not one to make her shiver for his enemies, but only for himself.

In their own room she told him, under her breath, what Danforth had said about Hidalgo Petroleum. But he flouted it, saying scornfully:

"Of course, he'd cover his tracks; any fox does that. If he said sell, it's all the more reason for not selling."

"Oh, no, Lester!" she replied despairingly. "I tell you, you're wrong. Danforth isn't a fox. He's a bear. You are wrong! Sell the stock Monday!"

This opposition only exasperated him — partly because in the depths of his heart he had a fearful foreboding that she might be right. "Sell!" he repeated, as though she had offered him an insult. "How can I sell? You talk like a crazy woman! Haven't I told you I've got to hang on until I can get out of the hole? . . . But he's lying to you. I know, I tell you! I know!"

And in all this obstinate vehemence and exasperation she saw too well the signs of incurable weakness. Terrified over his situation, he was really incapable of making a strong, steady effort to extricate himself and could only sit like an animal, panic-stricken and paralysed, waiting for what would happen.



VI

PEGGY MAKES A MOVE

A LITTLE before eleven o'clock on Sunday morning Danforth Crane stood in his spacious bedroom on the second floor of Overlook House surveying himself — with a poignant edge of regret in his mind fairly as when one looks at the dead. In a manner he was looking at the dead.

He was clad in a brown bathing suit, trimmed with black stripes at top and bottom — a costume which ruthlessly disclosed what a skilful tailor managed pretty well to conceal. Undeniably he was getting fat. The bathing suit revealed a paunch — almost threw a spotlight on it — which his well-made everyday clothes kept in the background. His mighty legs and powerful shoulders were too well padded with flesh; the legs hairy, also, like the backs of his hands and wrists. This was no figure of youth. The figure that had excited admiration in his athletic days was gone — dead! Something of the feeling which the dead evoke shadowed his mind. Of late, he'd been too busy to take decent care of himself. He resolved to look up Mulligan and get himself in condition

again; he'd find the time somehow if he had to take it at night.

He lit a cigarette, thrust his feet in bath slippers and slipped on a long gray waterproof coat, which was better. He then went downstairs, left the house by the west door and walked out into the strong sunshine by the roadway — a superb day, cloudless, and the whole wooded, flowery landscape vividly alive in the full tide of later June!

A moment later he saw the car coming — the old closed car which they used for bathing and called the water wagon. Peggy was still practising the woman's subterfuge of looking pleasant, however she felt, and as he opened the car her voice tilted gaily at him, "Hello, Dan!"

She was curled in the corner of the seat, in a bathing suit, too, a tan-coloured waterproof coat loosely around her, a blue cap over her hair. And while the beach dress made him look older it made her look younger. A sweet arm, outside the tan cocoon, shone like the wing of an escaping butterfly; her smiling eyes and curved lips set a strong snare; concealing her hair under a cap gave her a roguish suggestion of masquerading as a boy. He was penetrated by a feeling that her charm touched perihelion at that instant; never again could she be quite that, and she could never have been quite that before.

And as he settled himself he was aware of how the old seat cushion sagged under his hundred and

ninety-six pounds as though a brick had been tossed into the scale against a feather — for she weighed practically nothing; with a spring from her toes and a spread of wing she could float away.

She began chattering to him about the loveliness of the day, and anticipations of the first dip of the season. The chatter was all on the surface, however. She had telephoned him at ten o'clock that she would call for him at eleven, as they had agreed the day before. But when they agreed the day before she had supposed that Ted would be with them. Now Ted had disappeared, abruptly, without notifying her; there was a pull at her heart; and sad, pestering thoughts, like persistent gnats, infested her mind in spite of herself. But she held all that beneath the surface, shining and bubbling to him.

The run to the beach was a matter of four minutes, and they climbed out of the car, shedding their waterproofs. On that rock-bound coast beaches suitable for bathing occur only at intervals. This one was half a mile or so long, a low, gently-curving, sandy shore with promontories of the rock battlement thrust out at either end. A little rocky island faced it like a star set midway between the two horns of a crescent moon. The sea was quite still, long waves rolling lazily in and breaking in foamy babble as they reached the shallow water near shore. Danforth and Peggy walked across the broad, slightly-sloping sand to the water's edge — oddly contrasting figures, her light grace

beside his swarthy bulk. They waded in a little way until the surge from a broken wave washed their knees, the cold water stinging their warm flesh.

She stopped, crouching a little, cuddling herself together, and looked up at him with comical dismay, crying, "Oh, don't you hate it at first! Just at this point I always wonder why I was such a fool! Shall we swim over to the island?"

Danforth measured the distance and replied hardily, "Yes."

But she suggested, "Perhaps you'd rather not. We can take a turn and back." It was a kindly suggestion, he knew; he knew also that it referred to that swell in the front of his bathing suit; he was not in condition.

He smiled and replied, "Oh, the island."

"Let's run, then!" she exclaimed, holding out her hand; and that was sheer youthful zest. He caught her hand and they ran forward, through the recurrently deepening icy surges, until a long, smoothly-moulded wave advanced upon them. "Now!" she cried, letting go his hand, and as the wave rolled near she dove into it, her feet twinkling for an instant against the water wall. He squatted, let the wave roll over him and rejoined her on the other side. Striking out toward the island, the blood racing through her veins from the icy bath, she shouted to him ecstatically,

"Isn't it perfect! This is glorious! Oh, why didn't we go in before!"

Her slim body slipping through the water, propelled by skilful strokes, she laughed in pure joy of existence, turning a shining face toward him. Presently she dove, then rolled on her back, spread her arms and lay still, her chin uptilted, her eyes closed, dissolved in the happiness of living. Danforth too enjoyed the swimming and enjoyed her delight in it; but he ploughed along very steadily, without any antics, because for a man out of condition it was quite a pull to the island.

There was a strip of sand around its base. She reached it first and flung herself down on her back, relaxed, letting the grateful heat of sand and sun penetrate her chilled body, her breast rising with long, full inhalations. Danforth climbed up beside her and lay down on his face—the swell of his paunch being more noticeable than ever when he lay on his back and he was further out of wind than he cared to let her know. For many minutes they lay almost still, while the sun warmed them. Then she curled on her side and began talking, casually at first.

The vigorous young animal, which she partly was, had reacted to the delightful bodily sensations of immersion in cold salt water and the exercise of swimming. She had seemed as exclusively occupied with delight as a lark seems to be when it

soars and sings. But all the while that mournful brooding and puzzlement had been locked up in the back of her head. She said that she had thought Ted would be with them for the swim today. A shadow gathered in her eyes; a little droop came to the corners of her lips.

"Dan, do you know why Ted went away?" she asked abruptly, and in the abrupt question he caught a plaintive cry.

"Why, no; I didn't know he'd gone until mamma said so at dinner last night," he replied.

She who had seemed all delight some twenty minutes before now as visibly seemed all sorrowful. "I'm miserable, Dan," she said — like repeating the little cry in a yet more plaintive note. "I don't know what to make of things."

"What things, Peg?" he asked soberly.

Her head lay on her outstretched arm as she curled on the sand — awfully near to him. She crooked her arm, raising her head to her hand and for a moment made meaningless marks in the sand with her finger.

"Will you tell me exactly the truth, Dan?" she pleaded, her eyes looking into his at that short range. "I sometimes think they're trying to fool me about something. You mustn't try to fool me. You're the dearest friend I have in the world."

He waited a moment, to be sure of controlling his voice before answering soberly, "Yes, I'll tell you the truth, Peggy — any truth I know."

She hesitated a moment, and warned him, "You promised, you know." Then she asked plumply, "What was it Lester Hilton showed you at the dinner table last night? Aunt Anne said Ted's father had telephoned him from New York to come down there immediately on some business affair. Then Lester Hilton took a telegram out of his pocket and showed it to you. I'm sure, from the way he looked, that it was something about Ted. . . . I don't think I like Lester Hilton very well. What was it he showed you — honour bright?"

"It was a telegram from Ted's father at Atlantic City," Danforth replied. "I should judge that Pennell had gone down there to spend Saturday afternoon and Sunday. At any rate he was there around five or six o'clock yesterday afternoon, and wired Hilton on a matter of business. But the wire wound up with a message for Ted, as though he supposed Ted was still here."

He saw her droop under that, with veiled eyes, and gave her ample time to say something further. As she said nothing he presently gave her some friendly advice:

"I shouldn't bother about it, if I were you, Peggy. I've found out that it's sometimes better not to know too much. I've told you about the wire because you put me on oath, but it was no good service to you. Often, it's a lot better not to know too much."

She silently protested at that. How could it be

better not to know too much about the person one loved? That amounted to accepting a tacit plea of guilty on his part.

"There's something I don't understand," she exclaimed woefully. "I know Ted hasn't done any wrong. . . . I mean, he hasn't meant to do any wrong. . . . I mean, any real big black wrong." It was difficult to say just what she did mean. In the difficulty she appealed to him forthright:

"There's something about that maid, Katey, you know. . . . I sometimes think they're trying to fool me. There's something I don't understand. You see, Teddy and I were talking about it yesterday. He told me he had nothing to do with her going away and didn't know in the least where she was. . . ." It was difficult to say; but she needed help, and here was her dearest friend in whom she trusted implicitly; a very able man, moreover, who could help if anybody could.

"Teddy and I were talking," she repeated, "and he said to me, positively, that he didn't see Katey at all last Thursday. He was very positive about it. He hadn't seen her at all that day — unless, of course, it might be somewhere around the house. I mean he hadn't seen her outside or anything like that. He was positive about it. . . . Well, mother and I rode over to the Harlows' beyond Stony Cove Thursday forenoon. Mother had an errand there. And when we were coming back we saw Ted's car on the road ahead of us. He stopped a little way

out of Stony Cove and took Katey in the car with him. And then we saw them twice again — ahead of us on the road — driving this way, or toward Windham. I'm sure of it, Dan. I saw it myself." He saw her throat swell and her voice trembled as she asked, "Why would Ted have told me that he didn't see her at all that day?"

An answer seemed superfluous, so he made none; and she would have been shocked if she could have known that his mind took possession of the information she had just given him with an ominous satisfaction — like a lion putting a possessive paw on a fallen deer. After a moment he repeated his friendly advice: "Don't bother about it, Peg. It's often a mistake to know too much. Ted's only a youngster."

"But I have to bother, Dan!" she protested with pain. "I have to bother! How can I just shut my eyes? There's something. . . . I believe in Ted still — as to meaning anything wrong — any real, black wrong. But there's something. . . ." Her trouble and passion burst forth, "I mean to know! I'm going to know! I'm not going to just shut my eyes and let it go. If there was anything about me I'd want him to find out. I'm going to find out! You must help me, Dan. I count on you. If you find anything, you must tell me — honour bright!" Her outburst ended plaintively, "I'm very miserable," and a spray of tears dimmed her eyes.

The tears moved him deeply — from her who

ought to be the very spirit of joy as when she gamboled into the water. For the man who had caused them he thought, savagely, "Damn the cub!" After an instant he said quietly, "Of course, you may call on me, Peggy, for anything I can do. Don't at any rate, take it too seriously. It may be all some quite simple affair, easily explained—at worst a bit of heedlessness. Ted is a youngster; he's never had much discipline. Probably it's some simple enough thing, when you get the explanation."

She brightened at that, saying eagerly, "Yes, that's what I tell myself. . . . It must be so. Only. . . ." Only, there was a cloud.

"Wait and see," he advised again. "Of course, if you really wish to find out what has become of the maid, I can manage it for you."

That sounded rather sinister—like tracking down a criminal. But while she hesitated about that, she had no hesitation in another respect. "I know I can bank on you, Dan," she said. "I always think of you—why, like the biggest rock over there." She nodded toward one of the craggy promontories. "It's fine to have somebody like that. You know I've always loved you."

Danforth looked at the sand and muttered, "Thank God for that, Peggy."

A moment later she stood up and said, "Shall we go back?"

That was the way of it. She gave him a cup of

water from the overflowing fountain — sweetly, graciously, open-heartedly — and immediately thought of something else. The fountain belonged to somebody else. He realized all that, with a slight smile, as he stood up and they waded into the sea. Thereafter their talk was of an incidental sort.

Danforth climbed out of the water wagon at Overlook House and went in to resume his ordinary dress while Peggy went on home. The fountain belonged to somebody else, he thought heavily. A little later he encountered his father, to whom he had something to say — a small matter, to be sure, but which still needed to be said,

“I’ve decided not to go back tonight, father,” he remarked. “Looks pretty good to me up here. I think I’ll stay a week.”

The judge gladly received the message, which altered his face as remarkably as when a dim room is suddenly flooded with light. “Fine, Dan,” he replied, in a throaty tone. “You’re getting wise as you grow older. This beats Wall Street out of sight. Better stay a month.”

“Well, hardly that,” said Danforth; “but a week anyway. There isn’t anything so tremendously important now — until Coombes lands the twenty-ninth or thirtieth.”

“You think that’s all right,” said the judge — hardly making a question of it, for they had been over it before.

"Sure to be," Danforth replied confidently. "We'll fix it up with him. I'm so sure of it that I'm going to dump some more Hidalgo if the market braces up a bit."

And that subject troubled Judge Crane so little that he observed, "Glad to see this sunshine. I want to get your mother out for a spin this afternoon." That, at present, was his trouble.

"It will do her good," Danforth commented, sympathetically to his father's trouble. It was his own trouble also in a way, for he was fond of his step-mother and sincerely sorry for her affliction.

The spin, behind a pair of the judge's prize-winners, came off satisfactorily — likely to do any one good, it would seem, for the road, back from the coast, wound through lovely woods that smelled of summer, and in the smooth action of his cherished horses the judge took a delight that was akin to the artist's. Returning to the house, he drove on to the stables — mindful of the doctor's warning that he must take some bodily exercise on his legs every day. On leaving the stables therefore, he dutifully struck out to walk a mile or more through the trees and so back to the house. Going afoot through the woods he presented a tall and still sturdy figure, in a trig brown suit and straw hat, swinging a stout walking stick; as blandly content for the moment as a worldly-wise old man, with many disillusioning experiences, had any right to expect.

He had been following a bridle path for a little distance when he saw a solitary horse and rider slowly approaching. Whereupon he slackened his pace somewhat, his thick eyebrows moved slightly toward each other and the heavily graven lines around his mouth settled into a rigid parenthesis, the corners of his mouth turning down. Evidently the rider brought something to his mind with which he was not content. He walked still more slowly. In a moment the rider looked up, saw him, and smiled, and at that he stopped, waiting for her to come up. It was Peggy Loughman, alone. Smiling — somewhat mechanically perhaps — she drew rein as she came up to his tall figure.

Smiling also, the judge observed, "Riding alone, nowadays," as he passed a familiar hand along the mare's glossy neck.

"My pal has left me," she replied — with a kind of a yearning and aching toward him behind her slight smile. She had, of course, known him all her life and she was fond of him; but in a manner quite different from her fondness for Danforth. When she was a little girl the judge — kindly and often jolly — had always seemed somehow tremendously grown up, a benevolent yet aloof figure engaged in great affairs beyond her ken. A certain sense of that aloofness had remained with her; she was always, so to speak, looking up at him and vaguely wondering about him. Yet she was fond of him and felt that he was fond of her. Just now

she was wondering wistfully whether the tall, puissant judge could stoop down and humanly help a girl about a trouble that afflicted her heart; there was a sort of yearning and aching toward such help from him. But would he understand?

"Yes, Ted's gone away," he replied soberly to her remark — speaking in his throaty way that grated a bit as though the organs of speech needed oiling. He was looking up at her as he said it and she saw that there was a trouble, too, in his eyes. That instantly unloosed her tongue.

"Why did he go, judge?" she pleaded — intimately, like slipping her hands into his, all reserves thrown aside.

Judge Crane passed his hand along the horse's neck again, looking very gravely up at her, and waited a moment before saying, "It was best that he should — for the present."

She caught her breath, her eyes growing rounder, and said in a fright, "He hasn't done anything wrong, Judge?"

He took another moment before answering her: "Ted's only a youngster, Peggy. He's been given his head too early. I don't like the way the boy's been let run wild. I don't think it's good for anybody to live twenty-three years without getting acquainted with a bit and a whip. I want my colts broke early. I like his father. He's a fine man in many ways; but I'm afraid he ain't got much nerve when it comes to doing anything dis-

agreeable to anybody he likes. Anne tells me he took his wife's death very hard. Maybe that influenced him about the boy — he couldn't bear to fetch the youngster up short. Ted certainly likes his own way and he's certainly lazy when it comes to any real work — maybe no lazier than any normal youngster is, but the normal youngster gets it taken out of him, and nobody's ever taken it out of Ted. I wouldn't wonder if Ted had got into the way of thinking that he can have what he wants by just wanting it. . . .

"You see, the boy's had a poor training, Peggy; and he's only twenty-three. There's nobody at twenty-three but can go ahead and make what he pleases of himself. He's still got a big margin to draw on. The mistakes don't count then like they do at sixty-three, when the margin is pretty near used up." He smiled at her heartily as he said it. "It's a long while yet before anybody can pass a final judgment on Ted Pennell. . . . You asked me if he's done anything wrong. He's got a wrong start."

All of which had an ominous sound to Peggy, from whose cheeks the pink tints had been fading. "He has done wrong?" she asked under her breath — for while the Judge talked in generalities the concrete case of Katey, the maid, was in her mind.

But the practised cross-examiner was not to be forced into saying more than he wished. "He's

got a wrong start, Peggy," he repeated. He fooled with the horse's mane a moment. She saw him slightly moisten his lips with the tip of his tongue and understood that he was more deeply troubled than his words alone showed.

"You know my wife is very fond of Ted," he resumed, in a lower key that brought her intimately into it. "She loves him like her own son. There's nobody in the world she loves more—maybe nobody she loves as much. . . . You know she can't stand agitation and excitement. I have to trust to you not to say anything to her. She mustn't be disturbed about Ted." He was looking her in the eyes and she comprehended, not without a touch of awe, that in a manner he was laying his wife's life in her hands.

"It's best for Ted to go away just now," he resumed. "Probably he doesn't like that any too well. I've no doubt he'd rather be with you. I've no doubt he loves you, Peggy, and wants to be with you. . . . We all love you very much, too, Peggy."

He said it with a kind of dry simplicity; but he was not wont to say such things. Coming from the tall old man, she felt it to be a big declaration.

"It's been on my mind whether I ought to say anything to you," he went on. "If it should get to my wife in any way it might be bad, and maybe I've no business interfering. But I don't count on Ted,—not now: not for a good while to come. No doubt he wants you. He might come here to see

you unknown to me. Or he might send for you. . . . I think I ought to say to you, my dear, that if you were my daughter I wouldn't let you marry Ted Pennell—or commit yourself to him. . . . Not now. You keep away from him, Peggy, until we see whether he's only made one big mistake or whether he's really a bad egg."

She couldn't have spoken just then, and he took a moment to reflect. Then he said, "That's all. You're a good girl, Peggy. You have friends. Just keep this under your hat. . . . Run along now."

With the last words, he smiled up at her, lifted his hat and started down the path—and so, miraculously, stepped back into the familiar frame, becoming again the judge she had always known, kindly but somehow rather aloof. She stared after him a moment, touched the horse's flank with her heels and was only mechanically aware that the animal got in motion.

There could only be one inference from what the judge had said—namely, that Ted had done something wrong and fled. She knew Judge Crane loved her and nobody she could think of would be less likely to interfere without strong ground; no one would be less likely to overrate mere youthful pranks. When he said that he would not let her marry Ted, if she were his daughter, something dark rose upon her mind.

There were different ways of dealing with such

a situation. She might have taken her misery out of sight and wept over it; and she did that at first. But her veins bore fighting blood. A black hand reached out for her most precious possession and little by little a high, daring spirit unfolded, spreading its wings for conflict. She resolved to know, and acting on that resolve she telephoned to Danforth Crane.

He found her in the place she had appointed — the glass-encased sun parlor projecting from the south end of the house. It had the advantage of an outer door, so that one could walk over from the roadway and enter without going into the main part of the house. It had the further advantage of being screened from the summer sun, and from outside observation, by potted plants and window boxes of flowers, making a snug arbour with gold fish in the shallow little pond in the centre of the green-tiled floor.

When Danforth stepped in from the outside and she rose to meet him he saw that she was pale and somehow looked taller; a Peggy different from the gay creature that had sported and shouted in the water five hours or so earlier, but no less charming, he thought. She was steady, resolved, braced to a high act; yet there was just a little trembling in her voice at first.

"I have made up my mind to find out what has become of Katey and where Ted went," she said at once. "I don't know how to do it, but you will

know. You must help me, Dan. You've promised to."

He took his usual moment before replying gravely, "No doubt it can be done, Peg — but you are sure you want to know?"

Although she spoke quietly there was no doubt about the decision in her tone as she replied, "Yes; I am sure. I have made up my mind to find out." What Judge Crane had said to her had been in confidence. But she felt privileged to suggest, "Perhaps your father knows something about it."

"Well, perhaps he does," Danforth answered with a slight smile; "but I've found out from long experience that what my father knows and doesn't care to tell is not to be found out from him."

That dashed her a bit for her idea had been that Danforth could ask his father and then tell her. But she had made up her mind, and while she might be dashed a bit she was not to be daunted. "Some one around the house must know what became of the girl," she said; and in a moment made another suggestion, "Perhaps Benjamin."

But Danforth smiled again, saying "Benjamin is working for my father. For purposes of telling anything he knows just what my father wants him to know and not a thing more." He considered a moment and asked her, a little quizzically, "Are you very sure you want to know, Peggy?"

"Absolutely sure," she replied.

"Well, I've no doubt it can be done," he remarked. In fact, all the afternoon he had been considering whether he should do it on his own motion. "I know a very good man," he went on; "an excellent man and strictly dependable — a detective."

The word shocked her. She had scarcely thought of the affair in that aspect of the police, the public, the machinery of the law. The shock kept her silent.

"I don't know of any other way to do it," Danforth remarked dryly. "I'm not a sleuth myself. I've no doubt at all that a capable detective could run it down rather easily — if you're really resolved to find out."

That once more called her resolution in question. She compressed her lips a moment and said, "Very well; call in the detective." But she couldn't help adding, anxiously, "He's trustworthy, you say?"

"Perfectly trustworthy," Danforth replied. He seemed to consider it further, and then said, "It's only fair to tell you, Peggy, before we call in any detective, that a chap there at the house — a gardener who, it seems, was in love with Katey himself — told me confidentially that Katey was lying in the luandry about five o'clock last Thursday afternoon apparently overcome with drink — or a drug, this gardener says."

She gaped over that revelation for a moment and her steadiness so far gave way that a cry burst

forth: "Call the detective, Dan! Call the detective!" For, after all, the revelation had been just a sharper challenge to her resolution.

Danforth accepted that as final, and went about it with his usual deliberation. That is he got up, heavily, looked around the room and inquired composedly, "Can I get central with this telephone?"

"Yes," she replied and with a kind of fascination watched him move across the room, seat himself at the little green stand, take the receiver in his big hand. Then she listened to the leisurely grumble of his voice:

"Give me long-distance. . . . Long distance? This Danforth Crane speaking. I am at Mrs. Julia Loughman's house." He put his hand over the mouth piece and asked, "What's the number, Peggy?" and he repeated the number to the operator. "Danforth Crane, remember. Call up the Cordwainer Detective Agency in New York and say that Danforth Crane wants to speak to Mr. Scott Cordwainer personally as soon as possible. Probably he'll not be in the office; but they'll know where to find him and get him on the wire. . . . Yes; thank you." He hung up the receiver and walked back to the ampler wicker arm chair in which he had been sitting before.

"Cordwainer is a first rate man," he remarked casually, after settling himself in the chair. "We've had occasion to use him two or three times. People I know say he's trustworthy. . . . Some of

them aren't. The first time I called in Cordwainer was about the disappearance of some stock certificates."

Coolly, then, he told her a long story about the disappearance of those stock certificates and how the detective found them. Some of it she couldn't understand; but she could understand that he was trying, kindly, to occupy her mind and ease her nerves during the long, trying wait for an answer to his telephone call. When he had finished the story of the stock certificates he began telling her of the second case in which he had employed the detective — until presently his even, deliberate, unemphasized utterance was punctuated by the ringing of the telephone.

Still, he was in no hurry — finishing his sentence, then walking over to the little green stand. Again she listened to the rumble of his voice:

"Cordwainer? This is Danforth Crane. I am up at my father's place at Windham. I want you to send a good man up here tonight — best man you've got. It's confidential; I want a man to be trusted. A girl — a housemaid — has disappeared up here under mysterious circumstances. I want to find her. Nobody knows anything about it as yet. I don't want anybody to know. . . . He can catch the midnight train to Boston and then get a morning train to Windham — reaching there about eleven o'clock. I'll meet him at the station in Windham. You can describe me to him so he'll

recognize me. . . . Very well! I'll meet him at the station at Windham; a good man, now. . . . Thank you. Good-bye."

Hanging up the receiver, he observed to Peggy, "He'll be up here in the morning. I'll meet him and fetch him to you."

Her heart fluttered, and she realized that an irrevocable step had been taken. But Danforth was considering. In a moment he remarked, "You might arrange to meet him here. We can come in by the outside door there. It's your case, Peg. I'll let you do the talking to him and he can report to you. No doubt you will soon know what's happened."

"I want to know," she repeated again, but her voice was low.

Smiling a little he arose, walked over to her and silently patted her shoulder. She caught his big hand, with curly black hair on the back of it, in both hers and kissed it.

"Good-bye," he said, low, and walked heavily out by the way he had come.

Walking back to Overlook House he was thinking, with a grim wonder in his mind. He hadn't lifted a finger on his own motion. True, the idea of engaging a detective and tracing down the vanished maid had occurred to him. Ever since the afternoon before he had held it in his mind, as one holds an object more or less at arm's length. He didn't know exactly what a detective might find

but he believed that, whatever it was, it would be pretty disastrous to Edward Pennell, Junior. Yet he hesitated to set the machinery in motion. That would be rather a stab in the back, after all. He had few enough scruples in the conventional way; but there was a largeness and boldness about him that made him disbelieve in stabs in the back. He had held his hand, not saying a syllable to Peggy that she could reproach him with, no matter what happened. He had even advised her to let the affair alone. Finally he had acted only at her persistent demand—merely as her passive agent. And so, without his having lifted a finger on his own account, all that he had wished had come to pass!

There was something a bit odd about it. It had happened to him before. Things that he had willed had come to pass as though his mere willing forced them to happen. It might be explained as coincidence, but he was not all sure about that. He was conscious of a power in himself. Walking back to Overlook House he believed more than ever in his star.

The girl's shining image shook his heart. All that was sweet and desirable seemed incarnate in it. Of course, she didn't love him in that way now; but that was only a step. For Ted Pennell he felt a perfect contempt—only a raw, incapable youth, spilling treasure out of his stupid hands. He himself might be thirty-six and dark and fat, but he

felt himself to be infinitely more worthy of her than the unformed, selfish youth. If only she could know now how he would love her and cherish her, setting her in life like a crown jewel! He alone could pay the price of devotion that was worthy of her. He walked on toward Overlook House in a strong dream.



VII

HILTON, DOWN TOWN AND UP

SINCE Saturday noon Citizen Samuel Thorp — with so much on his mind that the mind hardly seemed to belong to him — had been keeping away from Overlook House. When he was well away from it he could assert a fine and even contemptuous sense of independence in respect of it; but in view of certain conversational indiscretions on his part the idea of putting himself in a position where Judge Crane might — imaginably — stride over and lay a physical hand on his collar was rather disturbing. He felt more comfortable down in Windham.

And as he was keeping away from Overlook House, one of his resources for passing the time consisted of strolling over to the railway station and watching the trains come in. The station was a neat pressed brick affair, with a long brick platform parallel to the tracks and roofed over for protection against sun and rain. There was a grass plot on the side opposite the tracks, with two circular flower beds. The station was symbolic, meaning that people with money to spend freely who came swarming up the coast in summer must be met in one's best dress. On its own strictly local

account Windham's station would have been merely a weather-beaten shack like the one at Westfield.

About train time it was a brisk and agreeable scene, with half a dozen shiny motor busses from near-by coast hotels backed up at the long platform, a dozen taxicabs for hire and some private cars waiting to meet members of the family or guests. Also, there was quite a crowd of all sorts waiting for the train and on the part of those who were waiting for a commercial purpose the instant of the train's arrival was a moment of expectancy, as when a net is hauled in and the fishermen are watching to see how good a catch has been made.

Samuel Thorp had no commercial purpose, yet he shared sympathetically in the expectancy and altogether got quite a little thrill out of the train's arrival, his prominent pale eyes angling for every possible detail of the scene. So angling, just before the 11:12 from Boston pulled in on Monday morning, he saw a limousine roll into the station yard and stop on the other side of it, under an elm. And he at once recognized the chauffeur; the machine came from Overlook House. Sidling to a position by the corner of the station where he could see without being too much seen Samuel watched. But the limousine just stood there. Nobody got out of it. The train whistled; the clang of its bell and the rush of its approach struck Sam's ear; still the limousine just stood there. The long string of dingily black passenger coaches rolled up to the

station and came to a stop. Passengers began swarming out, immediately filling the platform. The hotel bussesmen and the taxi drivers — forbidden to bark invitations — stood expectant, or reached for hand baggage that was offered them.

Then the door of the limousine opened; Danforth Crane's heavy figure, clad in a dark summer flannels, climbed out and moved deliberately over to the crowded platform where it stood in passive conspicuousness. The swarm of passengers was rapidly dissolving, disappearing into waiting vehicles, or trudging away on foot. Sam's exploring eye caught a middle-aged, smooth-shaven, stockily-built passenger in a business-like grey suit who stood on the platform, a bulky black bag at his feet, looking about. At almost the same time this passenger's eye alighted on the burly figure of Danforth Crane. He caught up his bag and approached, asked Danforth a brief question, received a brief reply. The two men perfunctorily shook hands. Danforth led the stranger over to the limousine. The two climbed into it and the shiny machine rolled away — leaving Samuel Thorp in a speculative and excited frame of mind.

The question which the stranger asked was, "Mr. Crane?"

"Yes," Danforth replied.

"My name is Eastman," said the stranger. "Mr. Cordwainer sent me up here."

Whereupon the two men perfunctorily shook

hands and Danforth led the way to his car. In the car, Danforth took better stock of his companion, noting with approval that there was a deep dent in his square chin, that his eyes were quick and clear and his lips came together in a straight line. With approval he noted also that Mr. Eastman was quite undisturbed by his cool scrutiny — looking out of the window with natural curiosity as the machine rolled through the village street, seemingly as self-possessed as though he had been alone and quite content to let Danforth open the business in hand in his own time and manner.

"Your client in this case is a young lady," Danforth observed presently. "I'd rather she stated the case to you herself and gave what instruction she pleases."

The detective replied, "I see."

And presently Danforth spoke again, "I know Cordwainer rather well and have a high opinion of him. I told him to send the best man he had for the case is confidential. . . . The young lady is the principal, but we'll arrange so you can let me know what you discover — beforehand."

"Before reporting to her," said Eastman, to make the understanding perfectly clear.

"Exactly," Danforth replied.

"That ought to be easy," the detective remarked coolly.

"Yes," said Danforth.

They lapsed into silence and the car swiftly bore

them out of the village, up the coast road. Eastman was looking out of the window at the landscape.

"I was up here four years ago," he remarked casually: "a jewel robbery — Thatcher case. You may remember it. Fine country up here in the summer time. Crimes should always be committed in a fine country, near a good hotel."

Danforth only smiled a little at that cynical pleasantry; and they were silent again until the car stopped on a curving private roadway beside a thicket of shrubbery. Danforth liked men who knew how to hold their tongues. "We'll get out here, and walk over to the house," he said. "You can just leave your bag in the car."

When the detective climbed out, following Danforth, he saw, some dozen rods to the right and toward the sea, a gay and handsome house with a red tile roof, its doors and windows outlined in vermillion. Naturally he noticed that the road ran to the west door of the house and as they stopped behind the shrubbery he concluded that his guide would just as leave not be observed by somebody or other in the dwelling. He followed his guide across the sward and in through the door of a glass-walled sun parlor at the south end of the house. There in the profusion of potted plants and flowers he found himself in a cool and shady arbour that had a delightfully snug and hidden air. Directly afterwards a slim girl, in a white dress,

with tawny hair and beautiful dark grey eyes glided into view and his guide was saying.

"Miss Loughman, this is Mr. Eastman. I haven't told him anything about the case. I'd rather you did that."

The girl gave him her hand. They sat down, very gravely. The girl looked at impassive Danforth a moment as though searching for a cue, then bravely began the recital:

"Judge Tillman Crane lives just beyond here — north. There was a maid employed in his house — a Polish girl, I think. Her name is Katey Zobrosky. She is about my age and size — a very pretty girl. She left Judge Crane's house last Thursday. Benjamin, the butler, says she telephoned to him that she was quitting her place — wouldn't come back. He says she told him to keep her clothes until she sent for them. Benjamin doesn't know where she telephoned from. He didn't care, you see. He says she telephoned about three o'clock in the afternoon. . . . What I'm telling you about this, Mr. Eastman, her telephoning and so on, is what Mrs. Crane told me when I asked her about it. Of course, it's what Benjamin told her. I haven't spoken to the butler myself. . . . Then, about five o'clock — wasn't it about five o'clock, Danforth?"

"About five or half past," Danforth replied, being thus directly appealed to.

"About five o'clock or half past," Peggy re-

peated, "a gardener employed by Judge Crane, who is probably in love with Katey, says he saw her lying in the laundry—in the basement, you know. . . . He thought she'd been drinking, didn't he, Dan?"

"It wasn't quite that way," Danforth corrected. "A man who hangs around the place—a chap named Thorp—says he saw Katey lying in the laundry about five or half past, apparently insensible, as though she had taken too much drink, or a drug. Thorp told Louis, the gardener, and Louis told me."

"And since then," said Peggy, "nothing has been seen or heard of Katey that we know of."

So far it had been quite plain sailing. But if she were honest, she could hardly stop there. Eastman noted that her slim hands came together, clasping in her lap; and her breast swelled with a long inhalation, her eyes meanwhile holding to his face as though she had no power to move them.

"There is a young man at the house," she went on; "a nephew of Mrs. Crane. . . . His name is Edward Pennell, Junior. He had met Katey at a dance—once at least—and taken her riding in his car. He had her with him in his car last Thursday. He has gone away, too. . . . We don't know where he is."

Eastman waited a decent moment, then spoke soberly, "And you wish me to find out what has become of the maid Katey."

"Yes," she replied.

He turned it over in his mind, professionally, for a moment, and remarked, "It would be an advantage if I could be around here, where I could easily get in touch with the servants at Judge Crane's house and so on. Could you arrange that, Miss Loughman?"

The suggestion disturbed her; but she met it squarely, saying, "My mother isn't to know about it, you know. This is my mother's house."

"I see," he said simply, and fell to considering some other expedient.

But Danforth made a suggestion, "Your mother isn't likely to be curious about it, Peggy. Perhaps Mr. Eastman could pass as a visiting friend of your gardener. I mean if he wasn't staying in the house your mother would pay little attention."

"Oh, if he wasn't staying in the house," Peggy assented.

"I know something about trees," Eastman remarked. "Perhaps you could take me in as a tree doctor—come to look at the woods and so on. I'd rather be over the stable or garage than in the house. It would leave me freer."

"Why we could arrange it that way, I'm sure," said Peggy. "Dan can help me—I mean in explaining it to mother. She would pay little attention if you weren't in the house."

"Good!" the detective declared; and so it was settled. Fortunately the estate-owners along that

part of the coast were somewhat exercised by a blight among the chestnut trees that summer.

Twenty minutes later, or such a matter, Peggy, Danforth and Eastman — the latter carrying his brown bag — walked through the garden at the west of the house toward the garage. There they met that soul of careless hospitality to all mankind, Peggy's mother. By a little spying, Danforth had seen her there before the party left the house. Under a straw hat and sunshade she was superintending the pruning of some plants.

"This is Mr. Eastman, mother," said Peggy. "He's come to look up that blight in the chestnuts. They're full at Overlook. Dan though we might give him a room. There's a vacant one over the garage."

"Oh, certainly," said Mrs. Loughman. "How do you do, Mr. Eastman? See that he's made comfortable, Peg." And with that she dismissed the matter completely from her mind. She liked to fuss a bit over her flowers, but trees interested her only vaguely.

Having passed Mrs. Loughman, Danforth remarked, "The chap who told about seeing the maid is named Thorp. I can tell you where to find him."

A few minutes later the detective stood alone in a tidy room over the garage — comfortable enough and suitable to his purpose. Altogether he was well content with his case. There might be, in his profession, romantic souls who were always eager

for tremendously difficult and dangerous cases. But Milton Eastman had been at the business many years and had no illusions about it, or about anything else. He foresaw the rather easy matter of discovering where a young gentleman named Pennell — with whom his delightfully pretty and altogether corking client was apparently in love — had bestowed a seductive housemaid named Katey. It looked to him like a very comfortable and leisurely sort of engagement, to be pursued in attractive surroundings with one's creature comforts reasonably ministered to. That pleased him. And an excellent piece of business for the Cordwainer Detective Agency, too, for the Cranes could pay liberally.

He didn't trouble to think particularly about the case then. The first thing, evidently, was to look up the chap named Thorp, whom Crane had mentioned, and see what could be turned up in that quarter.

About four o'clock that afternoon, following the tips which Danforth had given him, he encountered the chap named Thorp on the street in Windham and engaged him in casual conversation — a feat, which, with Sam, was about as difficult as getting a duck into the water. This casual conversation continued some minutes, during which Sam discovered a cynical and sporty humour in the stranger which appealed to him. Then Sam observed in a tentative manner and with a grin:

"Guess I saw you gettin' off the eleven-twelve

this morning and goin' off with Danforth Crane, didn't I?"

Later on, parting civilly from Sam at the door of a saloon, Eastman walked off a few rods and then was compelled to stop and laugh. The idea that Danforth Crane was going to pay Cordwainer several hundred dollars, at least, for what Sam Thorp had told him in ten minutes was certainly amusing. Of course, there remained the matter of checking up Sam's statements and rounding out the details. But his case was pretty much finished already. He had always maintained that any blockhead who knew enough to keep from falling off the sidewalk would make an excellent detective after ten lessons. This present experience tended to confirm that view. But simple as the case was—and practically solved already—he was going to have assistance in solving it, although at this moment he was not aware of it.

That Monday morning Lester Hilton returned to New York from his week-end at Windham. Having completed his toilet, in his compartment, he took a look at himself in the tall narrow mirror, for he was always careful of his appearance. The mirror showed him a neatly dressed and handsome man—not merely one of the well-dressed crowd, but a man with something distinctive and individual about him; vivid, one might say. His dark hair, that curled slightly, was smoothly parted in the middle above a fine, sloping brow. His dark

eyes were too prominent and nervous like the eyes of a restless horse. His features were well-sculptured, his complexion olive. A meticulous tailor could have found no fault with his clothes. But behind this fine mask there was an incurable confusion — a tumult and jostling. The machinery of his brain ran feverishly, but he really couldn't think. What Danforth Crane had told his wife about Hidalgo Petroleum — was that really true, or only a stock-jobber's ruse to mislead? If it was true, he was in for a ruinous loss. If he sold his Hidalgo now he couldn't restore Judge Crane's debentures; there would still be a great deficit; he would still be an embezzler. The only way he could get out was through a rise in Hidalgo, and so — by no process of real reasoning but just through a blind and panic stricken obstinacy — he stuck to the idea that Hidalgo must rise.

His train was already standing in the huge, swarming subterranean warren beneath the Grand Central Terminal. Leaving it, he stepped, not into the daylight but into the steady glow of electrics which — regardless of the superfluous sun — maintained an even illumination through the twenty-four hours. He had the porter check his bag and, still underground, he stepped to a restaurant where he breakfasted hurriedly. Without seeing the sun he took a broad, electric-lighted avenue that led to the thronged platform of the subway where the whole population of a thriving country town could

easily have found elbow room. One might stroll about down here through fine thoroughfares, streaming with busy humanity, for half an hour all underground. He squeezed himself into a down-town express that shot him beneath the city to Wall Street.

Coming to the surface there, in a dense human stream, he filled his lungs with sunlit air and started briskly for his office in Wall Street. That extraordinary hive, dipping down from Broadway, was thronging to the day's work then. Ignoring the overflowing sidewalks, people poured along the narrow roadway, flocking into doorways, crossing, spreading, congesting, all in a hurry — a tangle of mad energy which to the casual observer might seem as irrational as the feverish activity of bees around the mouth of their comb.

Hilton entered a doorway, with others, went down a corridor, took the elevator to the third floor and stepped into the office of Pennell, Hilton & Company. This was the general, or customers' room, handsomely furnished and with the quiet air of a club parlor — almost with the quiet of a sanitarium. Comparatively few people came here. A net work of wires ran to the office — with excited customers, perhaps, at one end and the tumultuous markets at the other end. But there was no tumult, no air of excitement, here. A physician might have recommended it to a nervous patient as a place of repose. Hilton turned toward his own

room in the corner; but just then a tall and somewhat stoop-shoulder figure entered the customers' hoom — the senior partner, Ted Pennell's father.

"Ah, good-morning, Lester; just get in?" said he, extending his hand, and adding, "I decided to come up from Atlantic City last night. How did you find every one at Overlook?"

For a couple of minutes the partners stood talking, casually. Lester Hilton, in his outburst to his wife at the Stony Cove Hotel, had much slandered his partner who was by no means such a complete idler and parasite as he had alleged. There were a great many details as to which the senior partner was vague. There was a certain touch of vagueness — of absent-mindedness — in the way he greeted Hilton just now. One might have said that he wasn't exactly sure whether the person with whom he was shaking hands was his partner or his pastor. Commonly that air of a certain vagueness and absent-mindedness attached to him. It extended even to his clothes — good enough clothes, no doubt, but just hung upon him as though he had picked them up indifferently out of a heap. His face was high-coloured and he wore a patch of sandy sidewhiskers on either cheek — which was a bit eccentric for Wall Street.

He had many interests outside of Wall Street — etchings, for example, and porcelain. In the Street he commonly had that air of not minding very much. But many people felt a dependable quality

in him — a man to be trusted. Leaving aside the Crane connection he was by no means such a negligible factor in the firm as Hilton had asserted to his wife. All the same Hilton quite hated him now. But above all Hilton wanted to think. In his mental confusion there was a terrible feeling that the Sphinx was asking him a question which he must answer right on pain of death. He kept asserting an answer and then helplessly asking himself if that was the right answer — and wanting to think out what the answer should be. He went into his corner den, but almost immediately — abruptly — left it again and hurried out to the corridor where he stepped into an elevator.

Leaving the elevator on an upper floor he got a bunch of keys out of his pocket and went down the hall to a signless door into which he let himself. It was a small room with no furniture but a rug, a desk, a chair, a telephone — his particular retreat, hidden away in the huge building. Not even Pennell knew that he had such a room, which was an expression of his instinct to burrow himself far out of sight, all alone. He was feverish now, for it lacked only thirteen minutes of ten. He caught up the telephone, asked for a number; then gave his own name and asked for Mr. Samuels. A moment later he was saying eagerly,

“That you, Lem? Lester Hilton. Buy me five hundred shares of Hidalgo at the opening. . . . Same as before, you know. . . . All right.”

That is what the agitation in his mind, which seemed almost like thinking, had come to. Of course, Hidalgo was going up. Danforth Crane had told his wife it was going down to mislead her. And this secret means — giving an order over the telephone up in this room — was part of his burrowing. But the moment he had acted, his resolution wavered. Had he done the right thing? What difference would five hundred shares make even if Hidalgo did go up? Had it all been a mere convulsive movement, like a blind striking out in the dark? At any rate it soothed his torn nerves to be alone, out of sight. For many minutes he sat by the desk, staring at the wall. The market was opening, but it didn't matter. Preston, the office manager and "company," could run the business down stairs — with the senior partner's powerful assistance.

There was another thing that he had been thinking about, or trying to think about. Presently he used the telephone again, and at a quarter past ten, loathly, he went down stairs. The street was working at top speed then — with clamour and gesticulation on the Stock Exchange, with louder clamour and more violent movement on the Broad Street Curb, where a mob of brokers, steaming under the June sun, pressed together, breathlessly talking an outlandish tongue, not intelligible to the uninitiated. Also the street was working quietly with low tones and silent nods in the great banks

and security houses, but to vaster purposes. It must get its hundreds of millions turned over by three o'clock.

For some minutes, on purpose, Hilton avoided consulting the quotations. He shook hands with a customer and lingered, talking blandly, easily, forcing the note of unconcern — as a man of his temperament on trial and awaiting the jury's verdict might make loud jokes. At length, he retired to his own room, caught up one of the six telephones on a ledge beside his desk, asked for the curb quotation of Hidalgo Petroleum and his heart turned leaden as he heard the answer. Hidalgo was leaden, too — not plunging down like a human body in water, but sinking with a slow and ghastly deliberateness like a man caught in quicksand. It had been so sinking since the opening and was a hundred and eighteen now against a hundred and twenty-six at the close Saturday.

Woodenly Hilton went over to a desk in the corner of the customers' room, where sat Preston, the "company" and office manager. There he spoke in the most casual tone he could command:

"Wonder who's selling Hidalgo? Have you heard, Jim?"

And Preston, seated at his desk, snapped back at him with a touch of surprise, "Why we're selling it. Danforth Crane telephoned down to sell five thousand shares. I looked for you, but didn't see you around. I told Pennell."

"Danforth, eh," Hilton muttered, and turned back to his own room. The order must have come in while he was upstairs. There seemed something like fate about it. . . . But was Danforth selling in earnest? Was what he told Edith true? Or was his selling part of the ruse to make others sell? . . . It must be a ruse, for otherwise Hilton was ruined. His battered nerves cried for a drink, but he resisted the temptation.

The day went on — all in a breathless hurry to get the hundreds of millions turned over by three o'clock; but to Hilton it seemed to move slowly and fairly to stick in its tracks at times, and Hidalgo Petroleum was steadily sinking. Like a complicated automaton he went through many motions. Three o'clock finally came; but the automaton must go on for some time after that, winding up the day's business in the office.

It was four o'clock when he went down in the elevator and stepped out in Wall Street again, making for the subway. And amid all the confusion and depression there was a certain dawning in his mind — a grey light as though the sun were going to rise. He took the subway to Fourteenth Street and came out in Union Square where it was hot. Going out on the broad flagging he looked about and soon saw what he sought — his car drawn up with many others along the curb. In the tangle of cluttered streets to the south of the Union Square an automobile was a nuisance, but from here north

one had straight, wider thoroughfares and fairer going.

"Metropolitan Club," he said to the chauffeur as he climbed into the open car — a costly car, shining in every detail.

Years ago, before he had been even a more or less hand-to-mouth curb broker, Lester Hilton had tramped Fifth Avenue where all the luxury of a continent is heaped up on view. There are jewellers' windows, furriers' windows, gowns that cost a poor man's competence, elaborate places to eat where the price of a substantial dinner is given as a tip for the serving of a cup of tea, equipages that cost a farm, and, further up, dwellings for Midas. It had then been his dream to become one of the possessors of the luxurious street. And now — he himself recognizing that it was a bit childish — he could still get his little thrill from rolling up Fifth Avenue in a costly automobile.

In the early curb-broker days, walking along the avenue beyond Fifty-ninth Street, where the park lies at one's left and the Midas dwellings begin, he had usually slackened his steps a little as he passed an imposing marble building through the broad plate glass windows of whose main floor he could see men lounging in padded easy chairs, talking, smoking, reading newspapers or looking out at the world that tramped by. This was the Metropolitan Club — the particular haunt, as he then imagined, of the possessors of the golden street, the especial

seat of the mighty. To sit at a window of the Metropolitan Club, looking serenely down at a world that tramped by was the next thing — he thought — to Olympus. He could still get his little thrill from rolling up Fifth Avenue; but he found sitting by a window of the Metropolitan Club rather dull.

Entering the club today from the carriage-way he was aware of the Fifth Avenue windows only as an unconsidered feature of the big, handsome room. His business lay in the opposite direction, and in that opposite direction he turned — to a room, by no means notable for size or furnishings or outlook. A small room, in fact, with no outlook whatever, and for furnishings not much besides a smooth wooden counter extending lengthwise through it; yet quite a popular little room. Behind the wooden counter stood an experienced-looking person in snow white apron. His experienced eye lighted upon Mr. Hilton; a murmur passed between them; the man in the white apron set out a tall glass with cracked ice in it, a smaller glass, a square brown bottle and then stood expertly by with his hand on the syphon. Hilton absorbed the beverage deliberately, and the miracle for which his hurt nerves had been craving took place. The sun rose. His cold and quaking brain was suffused with the warmth and flattery of alcohol. He needed flattery just then; the stuff in the brown bottle gave it to him.

Three men from Wall Street whom he knew came into the little room. He greeted them cordially, offering his cigarette case. The four lined up together at the wooden counter. And presently Hilton was talking confidently, exchanging jokes and comments with his friends. He felt confidence; and contempt for his enemies, or for the forces opposed to him, arose in his mind. The pleasant fumes in his brain lied to him adroitly and he believed the lies.

When he strolled out into the big room with his friends, with an easy, assured air, it lacked only five minutes of five. He had told his chauffeur to come back for him at five; but he was in no hurry. The lacerating pull on his nerves had ceased; he had plenty of time. He gossiped on with his friends a few minutes and strolled out to the carriage-way, where his car was waiting for him. The distance that he had to go was barely a quarter of a mile, but he had not chosen to walk, for he loved all the accessories of luxurious living — like having a handsome car wait to take him only a few blocks.

The machine took him to Fifty-eight Street and he told the chauffeur to wait, then entered the marble lobby of a tall, narrow apartment building. The liveried doorman bowed to him; the liveried elevator operator said "Good-evening, Mr. Hilton," with deference. That was as it should be. The lift hoisted him to an upper story where he let him-

self into a small apartment, consisting of living room, bed-room, bath and kitchenette. The living room took up the full width of the building, its northern wall nearly all glass, admitting sunlight in a flood. The rug, curtains and silken upholstery of the divan and chairs were of a lovely silvery hue. One of the smartest and most expensive shops on the avenue had seen to the furnishings.

This was not where Hilton lived. His dwelling proper was an apartment over on Riverside Drive at twelve thousand a year. It had seemed rather sumptuous when he took a five years lease on it; but it was not a cause of any satisfaction now. The modish drift in the apartment line had been rather toward Park Avenue of late years. Nowadays, if he mentioned that he resided on Riverside Drive he felt bound to add a deprecatory or explanatory clause—saying he was tied up there with a long lease. Many of his down-town acquaintances lived out of town—up in Westchester County, over in Connecticut, or Long Island. But a business man must have some place to stay over night in town. Some of these acquaintances engaged rooms, or suites, at the big hotels by the year; but of late there had grown up a fashion among them of having a little apartment like this one—much snugger and pleasanter than a hotel—where one could drop in at any moment of the day or night and stay as long as one pleased.

That idea appealed to Hilton. True, his car

could take him from this spot on Fifty-eighth Street to his apartment on Riverside Drive in ten minutes. But he wanted his little apartment, such as his friends had. He explained to his wife that it was important to have a quiet place, away from the office, away from home, to which he could retire and mull over business affairs that required leisure and seclusion; a place also for conferences out of business hours. It pleased him to have his little flat. The rent was only two thousand dollars a year, and a couple of thousand would cover the furnishings. Even the kitchenette came in very handy; the ice box was stocked with bottles. He had to have what he wanted, if he could possibly get it; money ran through his fingers like water. He got himself a little drink, lit a cigar, sat down on the divan and glanced over the evening papers — which were placed on the table there every evening whether he visited the apartment or not.

He had been so occupied but a few minutes when the telephone on the table at his elbow rang. He listened to the message and said, "Show her up here." When he put down the receiver he did not resume his paper but sat expectant, waiting for the curtain to rise on a new adventure. When a knock sounded on the hall door he stepped over and opened it and found himself looking at a neatly-dressed woman of full figure, no longer young, but not old, either, who was looking at him with cool, blue-grey eyes.

"I am Miss George; Mr. Cordwainer sent me," she said crisply.

He had vaguely expected a somewhat more romantic figure; at least, someway, a darker figure. This woman was blonde, with sandy hair; but a domestic sort of blonde instead of a theatrical sort. With her full, neatly-dressed figure and competent air one might have expected to find her running a suburban delicatessen shop — capably, but not at all romantically. However, no doubt Cordwainer knew; and she was good-looking in her matronly style. If he had any intention of offering his new ally a drink and a cigarette, it automatically vanished. She someway reduced it all to a business proposition, and in that spirit he addressed her.

"I want you to find out what has become of a girl, Miss George." He took an envelope from his pocket and consulted a memorandum scribbled on its back. "Her name is Katey Zobrosky. She was employed as a parlor maid in Judge Tillman Crane's place at Windham. She'd been in Judge Crane's house a few months. Nobody in the house seems to know much about her — I mean where her relatives are, if she has any in this country. She disappeared last Thursday afternoon. Judge Crane's butler says she telephoned from somewhere about three o'clock that she was going to quit her job — wasn't coming back to the house — and asking the butler to keep her clothes until she

sent for them. But a man there — his name is Thorp — says he saw her lying in the laundry about five or half past. He thinks she was drunk, sleeping it off. . . .

"She's a very pretty girl. I've seen her myself around the house. There's a young man up there — Ted Pennell. He paid a lot of attention to the girl; had her to public dances and so on. He is Mrs. Crane's nephew, you understand. Well, he disappeared last Saturday afternoon. I think he's got the girl somewhere. I want you to find out. But I don't want you to start anything that will give the affair away until I know about it. Understand?"

"Certainly," she replied, as though an answer were superfluous.

"I have my own reasons for wanting to know what's happened between the girl and the young man. But I don't want him to know, or anybody else to know, that I'm taking a hand in it. If you find them, just keep still and notify me."

She waited a moment and asked, "Anything else, Mr. Hilton? Of course, the more I know to begin with the less I'll have to dig up." She smiled, showing fine teeth, as she offered that self-evident truth.

That was all he had meant to tell her; but he now felt the temptation to go on, and yielded to it.

"This Thorp told me about seeing the girl in the laundry. Of course, he's a blockhead — Smart

Aleck sort of blockhead. I don't doubt that he told the truth about seeing the girl; but what occurred to him was that she was drunk — because if he'd been lying in the laundry he'd have been drunk. His notion appears to be that the girl got tight and the butler covered it up because — presumably — somebody else was involved in it; a scandalous little spree there in the house, you see. . . .

"But that looks doubtful to me. Why would she have left her clothes? I was up there over Saturday and Sunday — left last night. I know two or three letters have come to the house for her since she left. It seems she was a great little flirt and no doubt some of her beaux have been writing to her. If Thorp really saw her lying in the laundry at five o'clock it's unlikely she telephoned the butler at three that she wasn't coming back. Possibly she did come back to get her clothes. A girl of that kind would want all her clothes — pretty and flirting, you know. If she did come back to get her clothes, why didn't she take them?"

Hilton's nervous eyes questioned Miss George's intelligent but impassive face a moment. "Suppose she came back and was given some drugged wine; and there was too much drug in the wine. . . . Of course, I know nothing whatever about it except what I told you at first. But it seems queer to me. If any accident happened, such

as I just suggested, there must have been some strong influence at work to cover it up. It isn't likely that any such influence would have been exerted to cover up an affair among servants. Ted Pennell left there directly after lunch Saturday — left abruptly. There's a Miss Loughman up there — supposed to be his sweetheart — but she didn't know he'd gone until dinner time Saturday. The story was that his father had telephoned him from New York to come down here at once on a business matter. As a matter of fact his father didn't telephone him and didn't know he'd left Windham. As for needing his assistance in a business way, the young man is twenty-three and knows as much about business as that chair."

"Is he related to the Mr. Pennell of your firm?" Miss George inquired.

"The Mr. Pennell of my firm is his father," Hilton replied. "You understand business has nothing to do with it as far as I am concerned," he added, with an unnecessary falsehood. "There's no business motive in it. But I want to know where that girl is, and what hand Ted Pennell had in her leaving the house and whether he's got her now; and I don't want anything done that will give the affair away until you have reported to me. Can you go to Windham tonight?"

"Yes," she replied. "Shall I telephone you at your office?"

He frowned over that an instant. "Not unless

it's absolutely necessary. I don't like telephoning in a case like this—somebody might listen, you know. Better not telephone at all. You can catch a night train and come back here any time; or you can telephone Cordwainer and he can send over for me."

She accepted that equably, saying, "Very well. And if you have anything new to say to me, you can go over to Mr. Cordwainer. He'll know how to reach me."

"Yes, that will answer," he replied. "Do you want to take down these names I have given you?"

"No; I have a very good memory," she replied casually, showing her fine teeth. "I'll go up there tonight."

He arose as she did. She said affably, "Good-afternoon, Mr. Hilton." He replied "Good-afternoon, Miss George," and saw her to the door.

There was a vague disappointment, for it had not been at all detective-like, but as crisp and business-like as a talk about a bond deal. All the same she impressed him as a competent woman, and that was the main thing.

He treated himself to another very little drink and lit a cigarette. . . . If he could get a cast iron grip on the Pennells it would, to say the least, be a very useful anchor to the windward. He didn't doubt that Pennell Junior was in a trap which needed only some skilful handling in order to be sprung to good purpose.

VIII

WHERE KATEY WENT

THE sign on the door said "CORDWAINER" and nothing more, as though one could know beforehand who or what Cordwainer was or go without knowing. The corridor from which this door opened had a dingy look. The building, on Park Row, was dingy, also, and quite ancient in comparison with the day-before-yesterday colossus which towered twenty-five stories beside it; but it suited Cordwainer's purpose.

In a small room — one of a suite behind that door — Jenny George sat half an hour after leaving Lester Hilton making her report to the man at the belitered desk. He was a man on whom nothing had been wasted; with no superfluous height; his wiry frame just conveniently sufficient to hold his bones together, and composed entirely, it seemed, of sinews and nerves. He wore a beard, trimmed as close to his thin cheeks as it could be without a razor, and cut off, in a point, immediately under his chin. His compact nerves seemed to have been wound up so tight that they could never be quite still — a lean hand was always fiddling with something on the desk, or touching his beard; his head moving in little impatient nods.

He was collarless and coatless, an unbuttoned vest hanging loosely.

Cordwainer never stopped; his mind and some part of his body was always going. His staff questioned whether he really ran down when he slept. His craft seemed to need, constantly, the most vigilant steering.

"A maid in Judge Tillman Crane's house, eh?" he commented, plucking at his beard, when Miss George had told her story. And here again there might be need of careful steering. "Milt Eastman went up there last night. Danforth Crane sent for him. . . . A chance that it might be the same case. We'll have to be careful. I'll tell Milt that you are coming and where to find you. See him first. If it is the same case we've got to look out." He knew from experience that being employed on both sides of the same case was a delicate matter. Jenny George understood that as a matter of course. . . .

There was no one to meet her when she got off the train at Windham station about eleven o'clock the next morning, but she was not used to being met. "Harbor House," she said to the taxi driver as he took her suitcase and bag — that being the name of the hotel to which she was to go. She found that it was at the edge of town, overlooking a fine, rock-bound, horse-shoe harbor that served admirably as a shelter for yachts and an occasional battleship in the summertime. The frame hotel,

evidently built in several sections, managed to keep a colonial look in spite of the broad, two-story veranda that ran completely around it. Jenny presumed, impartially, that Cordwainer had sent her there instead of to one of the more fashionable establishments away from the town because it was cheaper. But it wouldn't be cheaper to Mr. Lester Hilton. When she registered the clerk handed her a sealed envelope which a gentleman had left for her that morning and she recognized Eastman's hand in the superscription. The scribbled message ran:

"Will look for you on the veranda here at three o'clock."

So far, so easy. She had nothing to do but eat luncheon and sit on the broad veranda looking at the harbor. The message suggested that Eastman's case and hers were the same, which meant company and help; also, since he said three o'clock, that he was in no hurry. She was in no hurry, either, and took the bit of luck that came her way in due gratitude. Sometimes luck ran all the other way and she had to live, comparatively, in an ash barrel, working day and night. She composed herself most comfortable in a corner of the veranda, a neatly-dressed, full-figured, nice-looking woman verging to middle age.

There Eastman found her at three o'clock, greeting her with a cordial, "Hello, Jenny."

"Hello, Milt," she replied in the same spirit, as

he sat down beside her. "I was just wishing they'd go on losing parlor maids up here from now to October. I could stand a lot of this. . . . I suppose you know what I'm up here for."

"Same case' as mine," said Eastman good-naturedly. "There's a little boat starts from near this hotel at four o'clock and goes up a little river to a little town where — the natives tell me — they know how to broil a little lobster right; also, steamer clams et cetera. We'll go there and detect 'em at it."

"Got all all that time to spill?" she asked, most good-naturedly.

Eastman's good nature expanded into a chuckle. "This case," he replied, juridically, "is just about a hundred per cent. perfect. It's too good for a detective story; somebody ought to make it into an epic poem. Some people get all stirred up about the disappearance of a maid, you know. A person with a summer squash on his shoulders and a straw hat on that said he saw her lying in Judge Crane's laundry. Hence the mystery — what became of the maid? They send down to Cordwainer and get his two ablest detectives. The most ablest detective — having been brought up in the business and not on detective literature — gets the prodigious idea of asking the squash a couple of questions, and in two minutes the squash tells him the whole story. So now the mystery that you and I have got to solve is this: How many days can we

stall along here, where the stalling's pleasant, and keep the people who sign the checks from blundering onto the solution of their mystery without our help? I've always said the hardest thing a detective has to do is to keep from being detected."

Jenny George fully appreciated the cause for good humour which he thus disclosed. "As easy as that?" she asked, beaming.

"Just about that easy," he repeated. "Got your Bright Eyes book with you?"

That question referred to a volume on astrology, divination and fortune-telling which she had found useful as a means of setting up social relations with females of limited education.

"Uh-huh," she replied, meaning Yes.

"There's a little work you might do at the back door of a doctor's residence here tomorrow," he said. "But today we can concentrate our minds on lobster."

He continued to give every indication of being in the highest good humour, his eyes twinkling and a smile playing on his face, with the indented chin. But in a moment it appeared that his own mind was not concentrated on lobster. "Hilton called you into it," he observed; for Cordwainer's long-distance telephone message, necessarily more or less cryptic and in a sort of cipher which the agency used, had told him that much.

"Pennell, Hilton & Company, stock-brokers," she replied.

"I know about the firm," he commented, musing. "Sort of looks as though Partner Pennell and Partner Hilton might not be pulling together as brotherly as partners ought to. I don't see exactly why Partner Hilton would be sending to Cordwainer unless he was trying to get something on Partner Pennell's son. But maybe they're both just trying to save the young man from the consequence of a spell of absent-mindedness."

She knew that Milt Eastman would tell her what he had found out in his own time and way. Besides, except professionally, she was no more interested in what had happened to a parlor maid in Judge Tillman Crane's house than the man in the moon might be supposed to be.

In a moment Eastman mused aloud, good-naturedly, "Somebody's got something on somebody all right. . . . I'm an honourable detective; but sometimes I regret it keenly. It's a devil of a handicap. I've got something on somebody myself you see."

Miss George showed her fine teeth in a friendly smile as she remarked, by way of a gentle little warning: "Nobody can doublecross Scott Cordwainer and get away with it." That was a tradition in the profession.

"Well, no — not ordinarily," Eastman replied, smiling. His glance then wandered out over the rock-bound harbour and he observed, "As pleasant a place to commit a crime in as any reasonable de-

detective could ask. Hope that lobster will live up to its reputation."

How long they could "stall," as Eastman termed it — meaning how long they could loaf on the job — might be an interesting question academically; but it involved obvious risks and on Thursday the detective made a report to Danforth Crane.

About five o'clock that afternoon Danforth entered the sun parlour at the south end of Mrs. Loughman's house, for that embowered spot somehow seemed to Peggy the fittest place for this sort of business. She noted that he looked grave and when he had sat down in the place she made beside herself on the wicker lounge he reached over and took her hand in his big swarthy paw.

"You know I told you you'd best let this alone," he said soberly. "I thought you'd get nothing but distress out of it. What's the use of that, Peggy? Trying to find out things that may break your heart is poor business. . . . I've learned that pretty often things will come out right of themselves if you just let them alone. I want you to think it over a bit. You can drop the case now if you wish."

That sounded ominous and her heart beat faster; but she had made up her mind. As she had said before, dropping it meant accepting the idea that Ted needed to be shielded from some disgraceful disclosure. She shook her head and replied, unhappily, "No, Dan; I'm going to know."

As he frowned over that a moment she summoned her courage to ask, "You've found out something?"

"I say again, drop it," he replied.

Her fingers tightened on his hand, and again she shook her head. "No, Dan. I must know. What is it?"

He took his time about answering. "Eastman has a report — if you're sure you wish to hear it," he said.

His manner, and the repeated suggestions that she just shut her eyes, seemed sinister to her. He felt her slim, clinging fingers tremble a little in his grasp. She gently bit a corner of her lip and said, "Call him in."

Going over to the telephone Danforth darkly felt his star. Who could accuse him? He hardly lifted a finger of his own motion. He had urged her to drop the case in such wise that she herself must remember it in his favour thereafter. It was she herself who delivered young Pennell into his hands. Something odd about that, as though he had only to will it and it happened — and the thrill of her clinging fingers was in his nerves as he took down the receiver. In fact Eastman was waiting in the garage for the message.

Danforth seemed to have no nerves. In his habits and manner nothing could be attributed to nervous excitement unless it might be the smoking of a good many cigarettes, which, however, appeared

not to affect him at all, as though his tough fibre were impervious to them. He lit a cigarette now, and kept his seat by the telephone instead of returning to Peggy's side, as though he would have nothing to do with the scene that was to follow.

They heard the door open and Eastman stepped in, with his usual air of competent good-nature. He bowed to Peggy and stood waiting for a direction.

"Miss Loughman wants to hear your report — just as you told it to me," said Danforth, with a touch of dryness.

Peggy, looking up at him, moved slightly on the lounge as though inviting him to sit beside her; then folded her hands tightly in her lap. Her eyes held to the detective's square face as he sat down. He fully appreciated that they were beautiful eyes, and noted that the girl was somewhat pale. He was about, so to speak, to cut off her leg without an anaesthetic and at least he could look very sober over it and modulate his voice respectfully.

"I haven't talked to the butler at Judge Crane's house myself," he began, "but there seems to be no doubt he said the maid, Katey, telephoned about three o'clock in the afternoon, a week ago today, that she wasn't coming back and her clothes were to be kept until she called for them. About five o'clock or half past a man named Thorp says he saw her lying in the laundry, as you know."

Peggy nodded.

"Thorp's story was that he thought she'd been drinking — or perhaps drugged. But after I heard his description of what he could see, peeking through the transom, I got another idea about it and started on another track."

This, of course, was not true, for Samuel Thorp had actually entered the laundry — although from prudential reasons he had refrained from saying so when he talked to Louis.

"No doubt you know Dr. Bradford McKeon," the detective went on.

"Oh, yes," Peggy replied, surprised at the doctor's name coming into the affair.

"Dr. McKeon has Mrs. Crane's case in hand," Eastman proceeded, with a slight twinkling behind his sobriety. "He is around the house a good deal. We might guess that he's getting a lot of money from Judge Crane, you know, and would go a long way to accommodate the judge and the judge's family. Well, in looking around, I ran across Dr. Bradford McKeon."

This was the moment for beginning the amputation. The detective made a slight pause and added:

"About ten o'clock Friday morning — the morning after the day the maid disappeared — Dr. McKeon went to the undertaking shop of William Furness & Son, on Hill Street, in Windham, and bought a cheap coffin." He paused an instant to let the words have their full effect and then exclaimed sharply, "Don't faint!" at the same time

seizing Peggy's arm and giving her a slight shake.

Danforth arose, approaching the lounge.

"Brace up, Miss Loughman!" Eastman commanded, giving her another little shake. To Danforth he said, "Get her a glass of water."

For a moment Danforth looked down at the white face and lax body, wishing to pick her up in his arms and carry her away — and with a quite illogical resentment against Eastman. He saw that she was fighting against the faintness, however, and muttered, "I'll get some water," and lumbered away into the house.

It was a really uncomfortable two minutes for Eastman. The girl's breast fluttered for breath, her shiny head drooped, the strength seemed gone out of her body. The detective really thought of a wounded bird, and was quite uncomfortable. But she was coming back; she hadn't really fainted.

When Danforth returned she took the glass in her own trembling hand, got it to her lips and sipped. The two men stood, and sat, helplessly by, watching her revive — not an agreeable moment for either of them.

"I'll come back after a while," said Eastman, with a significant upward glance at Danforth, and arose.

"Yes; later," Danforth muttered.

But Peggy found her voice then. "Wait, Mr. Eastman. You mustn't go." The voice sounded weak, but he felt bound to halt.

She finished the water and handed the glass to Danforth and in a moment spoke again, more firmly: "You mustn't go, Mr. Eastman. . . . It is foolish of me to give way. . . . I ought to have been better prepared." A little spasm drew her face and her voice weakened again as she said, "I hadn't thought — of anything like that." And she had to wait another moment to get herself in hand again.

In the wait Danforth urged, "Go lie down a while, Peggy. Eastman can come back again."

"No, he mustn't go," she replied. "I must hear it all now. I'll not disgrace myself again. I'm ready now."

"I could come back in half an hour," the detective suggested; "or any other time."

"No; now," she repeated. "I'm ready now."

"Rest a bit, Peg — lie down a while," Danforth still urged.

A line came in Peggy's brow. "Don't make it harder, Dan," she begged. "I'm ready now. Let him go on."

And Eastman touched Danforth's arm, saying, "It'd better be now," and sat down. For he had been married and seen the birth of two children, and he understood. This woman on the lounge was only a girl, one would say, carefully shielded from all rough experiences; yet in her appeal and in her eyes there was womanhood back to Eve. The woman was ready now; she could endure her tra-

vail; but they mustn't exhaust her strength by argument and contention. Much more sober in mind than theretofore Eastman resumed his place beside her on the lounge and she felt that his voice was a little different from what it had been before.

"There was two undertaker shops in Windham. This one is smaller and more out of the way than the other. Dr. McKeon went in alone and didn't give a name, but to young Furness, who waited on him, he said that a maid had died in his house the night before and he had to see to her burial, but they wanted it as inexpensive as possible, so no undertaking services would be required. He picked out a cheap coffin and paid for it, saying he would have his own wagon take it away. He came back in a few minutes with a maroon-coloured motor truck. As he'd been gone only a few minutes it seems that the truck must have been waiting for him near by. The coffin was put in the truck and the truck drove away. The description of that truck corresponds with one used on Judge Crane's place."

He stopped apprehensively; but Peggy twisted her fingers together, her eyes upon them, and said, "Go on, Mr. Eastman."

"Dr. McKeon is regularly registered as a physician in this state. Of course, he's a rather famous person. The papers mention him now and then; probably most of the people around here know him

by reputation — some of them by sight. He made out a death certificate, giving the deceased person's name as Mina Stein, her age twenty years, her residence as Windham, and the cause of her death as heart failure. On the strength of that certificate, signed by the famous Dr. McKeon, a burial permit was issued without any question.

"Dr. McKeon's chauffeur, in his own name, bought a lot in a little cemetery above here, near Stony Cove, and made the usual arrangements with the sexton, or care-taker. The body was buried up there about four o'clock Friday afternoon. Dr. and Mrs. McKeon attended the burial and the doctor read the burial service. There were two other women and a man. The man was the doctor's chauffeur. The women were servants employed in his house.

"But no servant named Mina Stein was employed in the doctor's house. No servant in his house died lately. The servants up there say — at any rate one of them says — that a woman patient in a critical condition was brought to the doctor's house some time Thursday night and died before morning. Mrs. McKeon told the servant I am speaking of that the patient was sent there by one of doctor's friends. At Mrs. McKeon's suggestion the two female servants attended the funeral as a matter of Christian charity, for Mrs. McKeon said the dead person had no friends or relatives in this country. I'm told, on what looks to me like good

authority, that a closed car drove up to the laundry door of Judge Crane's house about eleven o'clock that Thursday night and in a little while drove away again — a woman driving. The natural inference would be that that car took the maid's body from the laundry to Dr. McKeon's."

He paused there, as though a bit uncertain for a moment; then added, "It seems that when the girl's body lay in the laundry young Pennell's coat was over it." Again he paused a little, and concluded, "So there the case stands, Miss Loughman."

There was no outbursts or nervous collapse this time. Instead Peggy picked at a fold of her dress and asked, so low he could hardly hear, "What will you do now?"

"I'm simply waiting for instructions," he replied. "You asked me to find out what became of the maid. I think I've already found that out. Of course if you wish to make absolutely sure I can go to the coroner and get an order to exhume the body and have it identified. But you understand that if we notify the coroner the case passes out of our hands. The authorities will go ahead with it then as they see fit."

She was silent a moment, and murmured, "You think it is Katey, Mr. Eastman?"

"Well, you see the circumstances, Miss Loughman," he replied. "A girl's body was certainly buried under an assumed name, and secretly as

nearly as possible, directly after this maid disappeared. Under all the circumstances, if I were looking for the girl on my own account, I should certainly look in that graveyard. Strange coincidences do sometimes happen, but I have never come across a coincidence as strange as that would be — the truck from Overlook House,— Dr. McKeon's connections with Overlook House and so on. . . . If you say so, I will look for the girl elsewhere. But if it were my own affair I should look for her there."

"Katey might have died of heart failure," she suggested after a moment.

"Certainly," he replied, readily.

But she immediately saw that the suggestion hardly helped matters. Why bury her under an assumed name? Why the secrecy?

Danforth Craine spoke up decisively, "It needs thinking over, Eastman. We'll let it rest where it is for a bit." He gave the detective a significant look.

The detective good naturedly replied, "You'll know where to find me." Without obtruding a good-bye on his client, he slipped out of the room.

When the door closed behind him Peggy looked over at Danforth. Her pale face made her eyes starry. She beckoned with a slight gesture and moved a bit on the lounge, making a place beside her. When he walked over there and sat down,

she took his hand in both of hers and leaned her head against his shoulder. He let her take her own time to speak.

"What do you think happened, Dan?" she asked presently, as though they huddled together beside a fearful secret.

"I don't know, Peggy," he rumbled. "Of course, I never thought of anything as — gruesome as this. . . . Ted hasn't learned; he's never been taught. He's always had his cake by just asking for it. Probably he's as selfish as most youngsters would be in such a case. What I thought of — if he had any hand in it — was that he might have got involved with the girl. Perhaps he'd connived at her running away; maybe knew where she was and was seeing her. Probably that sounds bad enough to you, and probably it is bad enough. But it wouldn't have surprised me very much. I'm bound to say it wouldn't even have shocked me very much, if no great harm came to the girl. . . ." He hesitated a moment and added, "Except for one thing, Peggy, and that's you. I should have been hot at Ted for treating you that way — to your face, fairly. Otherwise I should have thought little enough about it — an undisciplined youngster and a tempting cake. If he had any hand in it, I thought that was about what it was. . . ."

He let it rest there a moment and continued, "We must be sensible about it. If you look over what Eastman had told you — a girl was buried

under an assumed name, secretly as possible, just after Katey disappeared. I know Bradford McKeon well enough. His interest is in my father and mamma. A dead housemaid wouldn't be anything to him but a scientific object anyway. If Dr. McKeon was burying a girl secretly, using my father's truck and so on, just after Katey disappeared and it wasn't Katey, why it would be a remarkable coincidence. Probably Katey is dead and buried.

"Of course, that's shocking. But we mustn't let our nerves run away with us, Peggy. There was influence used to keep the thing a secret. Certainly Bradford McKeon wouldn't have issued a false death certificate to oblige a chauffeur, or gardener, say, who had accidentally killed Katey. And if Katey had died from natural causes there'd have been no secrecy at all. I haven't much doubt that my father is back of it for I don't believe Bradford McKeon would issue a false death certificate to oblige Ted Pennell. It looks to me like my father's hand. Probably you can see that yourself."

What she did see was the tall old man, standing beside her horse in the bridle path looking up at her and solemnly warning her, with love and reluctance, not to commit herself to Edward Pennell, Junior.

"But if we're sensible," Danforth went on, "we'll realize that it's absurd to suppose — whatever else

may have happened — that Ted ever set out in cold blood to kill the girl. The rational explanation is that something like an accident happened. When Louis told me about the girl lying in the laundry, he declared she never drank more than a sip of beer sometimes. His idea was that she'd been given a drug. That might possibly be true and there might have been an overdose. There might have been a scuffle and an unlucky blow. A dozen years ago there was a case that pretty nearly ruined a fellow I knew very well. He and the girl weren't even angry, but just scuffling in fun. Some way or other he tripped her and fell with her. The sharp corner of a dresser struck her temple and killed her. It was pure accident but it made an awful mess for his family. We must say, if we're to say anything about Ted, that some sort of accident happened. The girl was dead. She was taken down to the laundry in the elevator and taken away from the house at night and buried as we know. . . .

"Strong influence was used to cover it up. There's not only Ted, you know, but his family — his father and above all, mamma, who loved him like a son. There's even my father, too. A ghastly story of that kind paraded through the newspaper wouldn't make Overlook House more attractive. Of course we mustn't go to the coroner — at least not now. If we got to the coroner the case passes out of our hands. We must wait a bit."

"Yes," she said, "I think so, too," and raised her head from his shoulder as though it were settled.

He put his other hand over her's and urged, "Go lie down awhile; rest a bit. You're all right anyway, Peggy, dear. Go rest yourself."

"I will," she replied docilely, and he noticed how very quiet she was, as though she resisted nothing any more.

They stood up. She lifted herself on tiptoe and kissed him, murmuring, "Good old Dan!" Her eyes were quite dry, burning rather than moist. He watched her cross the green tiled floor and go into the house — some way like a dead girl walking — and suddenly felt a huge anger. That selfish, brainless, beastly cub, to hurt her so!

Peggy went upstairs to her own room, her heart numb as though its capacity for emotion had been exhausted. But her brain was not numb. She knew very well that if it had been an innocent accident — for example, just a tomboy scuffle with no shameful antecedents — there wouldn't have been all this secrecy and mystery. No such daring pains would have been taken to cover it up unless there was something sinister to be covered. Judge Crane had warned her solemnly; Ted himself had disappeared. A silver framed photograph stood on her dressing-table. As she looked at the smiling, boyish face, an uncontrollable shuddering seized her. His hand that had so often held hers — blood on it now, they said! . . . Poor, silly, pretty Ka-

tey; snuffed out, thrust underground hugger-mugger with never a chance to accuse her slayer. . . . She went over and lay down on the bed, dry-eyed.

About that time Edward Pennell, Junior, was experiencing a mild and momentary sense of satisfaction as he listened to some unfeigned compliments with a modest sense that they were not wholly undeserved. Confessedly he had played a rotten game going out, and he had been told so with perfect frankness. The telling had got a bit monotonous. Finally he had taken to heart the advice to buck up and on the way in he had rather covered himself with glory. His three companions were admitting it as candidly as they had pointed out the earlier defects.

They were still talking about it they tramped into the clubhouse, found their lockers and began divesting themselves of golfing togs, dropping the shed garments on the floor where they stood. It was not a large clubhouse, as such institutions go, and insufficiently provided with showers for the traffic of that rush hour at the close of the day. Ted and another stood about in careless and unabashed nakedness while waiting for their turn under the revivifying needles of cold water. After the shower and dressing they went out to the big half-moon veranda and sat around a green table consuming cold beer.

The view from this veranda was pleasant, fall-

ing downward across the open, undulating golf course to a bit of wood through whose boles the water of a small lake shone. Beyond that the ground rose, billowing, to the range of hills which were called mountains in that region — the region being the northern end of New Jersey an hour and a half from New York by train. The view was pleasant, but as Edward Pennell regarded it, when you said view, you'd said about all. The water of the little lake was tepid and weedy, unfit for swimming. Five men, besides himself, lodged in the clubhouse. He played bridge with them sometimes. They were very good men; but older than himself and mostly interested in other things. The afternoons were passable; there were always some good companions about then, and golf killed the time. There might be good companions in the evening, and there might not. The mornings and the vacant evenings hung on. The day it rained all day was like so many hours spent in a morgue. The moment he was alone, or not fully occupied, an unwonted lonesomeness assailed his heart. He even tried to escape it at times by the unnatural expedient of reading a book.

He had been here before — not as a lodger in the clubhouse, but as the house guest of a college chum. That time he had thought it a bully place; but at that time there was not in the atmosphere this gnawing sense of loneliness — to pounce upon a fellow the moment he was left to himself; lonesome-

ness, at that time, no more entered into his calculations than having the plague did. Mostly the summer people in this particular region and composing the membership of this particular club were in quite modest circumstances as Judge Crane and Lester Hilton reckoned circumstances. A good many of them were commuters, living out here the year round and having only one home to their names.

When the circumstances arose which caused him to leave Windham and betake himself to some place more or less out of sight, yet not out of touch, this spot had occurred to him. He had telephoned his chum from New York and the chum had readily agreed to put him up at the clubhouse as he suggested. With chums elaborate explanations are unnecessary. He had merely said that he might go abroad at any time and meanwhile wanted to lie by in some quiet place.

That had been Sunday morning — when he arrived — and it was now Thursday afternoon; a long while it seemed. Returning to the clubhouse he had wanted to go through to the office and inquire whether a telegram or long-distance telephone call had come for him. But he resolutely resisted that temptation, having an idea that he had already made himself something of a joke at the office by turning up three or four times a day to inquire for a message that never came. Nevertheless, as he sat out on the half-moon veranda

with his friends, taking a swallow of beer now and then, he kept an eye toward the broad door and whenever a uniformed boy appeared — as though, perhaps, with a message for some one — his heart quickened a beat. But no message came for him.

He was only an hour and a half from New York by train; but it seemed to him that he was about as completely lost from his real world as though he had been in China. No message came; nobody inquired; apparently he had disappeared about as though he had fallen off to another planet — a friendly planet, but not his. At moments he wondered what would happen if he should go on staying there, until, say, he was about eighty, with white whiskers and rheumy eyes, and then somebody from the real world should accidentally run across him and say, "Bless my soul, it's Ted Pennell," and take him back like another Rip Van Winkle. So far as concerned his absent-minded father lack of inquiry was easily explained. Their correspondence when they were separated was usually of the most incidental and casual sort. But he was teased by wonderings as to how some people in the other world were getting on and what they were doing.

Two of his friends were still urging the dance that evening. He would be right heartily welcome; they were sure to have a good time. It was just a snug jolly little party at Marjorie Weston's house; he knew two of the girls already. But,

astonishingly, he had no stomach at all for a snug, jolly little dance — a brand new experience, also. He knew it would be dull at the clubhouse, a dull dinner, a dull evening. But he persisted in the clumsy lie he had told. It seemed as though he positively wanted to be miserable and had developed an appetite for it as one develops an appetite for a noxious drug.

Presently his friends left him — obdurate in his refusal — and if he had been somewhat more given to introspection he might have wondered at the phenomenon of a splendidly healthy youth of twenty-three deliberately consigning himself to a dull, lonely evening as though some instinct prescribed heart-ache for him as another instinct sends a dog to a diet of grass under certain internal circumstances. He walked back to the clubhouse after going a little way with his friends. It was, in its ordinary aspects, a nice little clubhouse, but just now it yawned at him dismally. At the desk in the little office he had loitered about conspicuously a few minutes and stubbornly forbore to ask that foolish question whether a wire had come for him. He might have had company, of a sort, at dinner, but he chose to eat alone.

After dinner he went upstairs to his bedroom. Twilight was falling then — very beautifully over the wooded hills, if one happened to have an eye for the beauty. But as Ted Pennell, lighting his pipe, stared out of the bow window this twilight

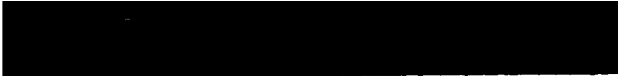
seemed to have a peculiar significance, as though the sun might be taking a definite farewell of the earth.

He was mightily impatient for that message to come. He wanted to leave this place and set his feet on a new path at once. And at the same time he was afraid it would come, for to depart from this place meant to leave somebody far behind, and he could hardly bear that.

Presently he drew up to the writing-table, turned on the lights, took a sheet of note paper and began:

“Sweetheart” :—

That was easy — but just what to say? — or ought he to write at all?



IX

DANFORTH MOVES

WALKING away from Mrs. Loughman's, after having left Peggy in the sun parlour, Danforth Crane was undecided, for once in his life, and although his swarthy face was composed as usual there was a great excitement in his mind.

The perfume of the girl's hair was in his nostrils, the soft touch of her lips on his. He felt himself very close to her and his heart pumped fast. Almost — he thought — the great prize was in his hands. That thought like a heady drug set him a-dreaming. He knew well enough how he stood in her eyes now, like a big brother or a beloved uncle. As yet she thought of him in no other way. But the man of whom she did think in the other way was being inexorably cancelled out of the account. A storm had upset her nest. He stood closest to her in the crisis. Observation and instinct told him what would happen. In her distress and desolation it would be to him that she would turn. She didn't know it, but it was only a little step from that love which she now felt for him to the love he wished. That step would be

managed; the dove would fold her wings on his breast.

Almost the grand prize was in his hand, and with the heady dream which that set up in his mind there was a touch of amazement. Only ten days ago "almost" had seemed as impossible as that Peter should appear in the roadway and offer him the keys of the heavenly gate. Of course Ted Pennell had thrown the prize away, but even so there was something extraordinary about it — as though his will held some mysterious commerce with the fates. He believed in his star.

But it was only "almost." He wanted it to come cleanly, so to speak, with no overt act on his part, a sheer gift from his star, and there remained a hazard or two. It was just possible that an astonishing coincidence had happened and that the girl who was buried by virtue of Dr. Bradford McKeon's death certificate was not the missing maid. Improbable, that, but barely possible. Another hazard looked more important. Dismissing the bare possibility of a coincidence, then the evidence that the girl who had been buried was Katey and that Katey had somehow been killed was contained in a cheap coffin in that little cemetery by Stony Cove where it was already in the process of vanishing through decay.

Powerful influence had been exerted. Danforth had no doubt it was his father's. Probably that same influence would be exerted to shield the cul-

prit. Six months hence, or even sooner, the culprit might impudently reappear, with a plausible explanation of his absence and repeat his denials of having had any hand in Katey's disappearance. By that time earth would have obliterated the one mute witness against him; he could laugh at an accusation. The culprit would have the eloquence of youth to plead his cause for him. Peggy loved him now; and youth easily loves youth again.

It was no spring-time affair with Danforth Crane — no young man's fancy lightly turning. He was thirty-six and by no means favoured physically for romance, with his big, lumbering body and rugged, swarthy face. Already he stood at the verge of middle age, with only a last look at the youth behind him. With him presumably it must be now or never. He was formed and hardened by many strenuous encounters. Naturally he wouldn't, like a youth in love, sit down mooning and hoping. He would plan and build with all his resources. He wanted more than an "almost."

This was in his hot mind as he tramped away from Mrs. Loughman's, mechanically keeping the roadway in the direction of Overlook House. For a few minutes that took him also in the direction of Mrs. Loughman's garage and stable and he saw Eastman's stocky figure strolling out from the garage. He thought the detective had been watching for him, to have speech with him.

The supposed "tree doctor" fell in beside him

and they walked leisurely toward the woods as though the doctor might be going to call his attention to some afflicted chestnut trees.

"What did the young lady decide?" Eastman asked, as Danforth waited for him to speak.

"Very likely she'll drop it," Danforth rumbled back. "The next step is a hard one for her to take."

"Naturally," Eastman commented. "Jail for somebody."

"If the officials get wind of it, they'll go their own way," Danforth remarked. "I don't want that myself — if it can be avoided."

"I suppose not," the detective replied. "But the officials might get wind of it anyway, you know."

In fact, Mr. Eastman was in a rather delicate position — for a perfectly honourable detective. He was employed by Danforth Crane and more or less bound to guard his employer's interests. But his colleague, Jenny George, was employed by Lester Hilton, whose interests might lie precisely in informing the authorities of what had been discovered, for Jenny knew as much about the discoveries as Eastman did. In that case the Cordwainer Agency might, so to speak, be taking Crane money with one hand and blowing up the Crane family with the other.

That dilemma had been submitted to Cordwainer over the long-distance telephone, in the argot they

used for such purposes, lest a telephone operator learn too much. Cordwainer at once reached the most honourable decision that was possible under the circumstances. If, through causes over which the agency had no control, one client or the other must be thrown down, let it be the client who had the least money and was least valuable to the agency — namely, Hilton.

But back of all that, there was another difficulty in Eastman's mind. He possessed information which presumably had a high cash value. If a girl had, figuratively, been knocked on the head and covered up, somebody, presumably, would pay handsomely to keep the covers on. That fact rather teased Eastman's capable mind. He was an honourable detective — at present — and there was much foundation for Jenny George's dictum that nobody could double-cross Cordwainer and get away with it. Still — well, there was a kind of sadness in kissing the chance definitely good-bye. All around his situation was rather delicate.

His last statement, that the authorities might get wind of it anyway, sounded like a warning. Danforth looked down at him out of the corner of his eye and asked, "You think so?"

"Well, in a case of this kind you can't do anything without taking a chance of stirring something up," the detective explained, amiably. "That young man in the undertaking shop — Furness — might talk to somebody. I had to look up

the death certificate. A servant at Dr. McKeon's house might get to gossiping. You never can tell."

Danforth took his usual moment and observed casually, "I suppose not."

And there the detective might have left it — he thought afterwards. He had dutifully dropped a broad hint. But Cordwainer's instructions had been explicit, so he pushed further:

"The question is — supposing anything should get stirred up — how would that leave you? I'm working for you, you see, and a good detective will try not to smash his own principal." He hesitated an instant and took the final step, as Cordwainer had directed. "No doubt the authorities can be blocked — now."

"How?" Danforth demanded.

"Why, the real evidence is in that coffin — if I've got it doped out right. The body can be removed."

Danforth decidedly did not like that, for as yet he decidedly did not want the evidence destroyed. But he couldn't say so, so he said nothing.

"I don't know's I should care to do it myself," Eastman commented. "It's hardly in my line. But of course it can be done."

"I shouldn't care to do it, either," said Danforth, very conclusively.

"Well, nothing may come of it," the detective returned, easily — and in secret highly satisfied.

He had given the warning, showed how the danger could be avoided. What more could be required of him?

After a little while Danforth asked, as one speculating aloud, "Do you think it's possible there was a coincidence — another girl buried?"

"I'd bet both legs against it," the detective replied.

A further pause, and Danforth said, "If you hear anything new, of course you'll let me know."

That seemed to end the conversation. Eastman replied, "Sure," and stopped — letting Danforth tramp on toward Overlook House alone. The detective himself turned to the left, made his way out of Judge Crane's grounds and took the trolley to Windham. He and his colleague had found the lobster excellent up the river and meant, this evening, to see if it was as good in another place they had heard of.

"Looks sort of dubious to me, Jenny," Eastman mused aloud as the hired automobile bore them toward the rendezvous with the shore dinner. "I gave him the best chance in the world to mislay the corpse and he wouldn't have a thing to do with it,— turned it down flat."

"Maybe he's got the coroner fixed," Jenny observed. "Or maybe he's sure nothing will happen. How strong a hunch did you give him?"

"Strong enough," Eastman replied, rather evasively. "He turned it down flat."

"Well, it's up to him," said Jenny cheerfully.

"It sure is," said Eastman, still speculating. "Looks to me as though it was bound to be unpleasant for the judge. It's true, he may have had nothing to do with it. Young hopeful may have arranged it all on his own hook. Anyway it seems clear that D. Crane, Esquire, ain't losing any sleep over what may happen to young Pennell. . . . Maybe he ain't losing any sleep over that even if it does give his celebrated father a wallop in the ribs. . . . I don't know what his game is. He's a gentleman who knows mighty well how to hold his tongue."

"Maybe he's in love with the girl himself," the woman suggested.

"Well — maybe," the man replied very doubtfully. "But he don't look the part. . . . Long and short of it is I've done my job and the rest is up to him. . . . It would be interesting to know what Judge Crane himself would say about it," he added, with an absent air.

"But what am I going to do?" Jenny asked. "I haven't peeped to Hilton yet?"

"We'll just sit still and eat lobster for the present," Eastman replied. "Hilton can wait a day or two." He looked around at his companion and observed, "You never can tell. A little windfall might come our way before this is over with. You never can tell."

There was, perhaps, something significant and

suggestive in that observation. But Jenny George replied very good-naturedly, "Can't double-cross old Cordy and get away with it, Milt."

Eastman pondered that an instant and replied, not without disgust, "I sometimes doubt if I could double-cross a fried spring chicken and get away with it."

Their car was leaving the good road then and turning into a poor one that led down to a tiny cove where, on an abandoned scow, with a good many flies in the melted butter and not a few mosquitoes, they would eat some well-cooked sea food under conditions which many tourists regarded as tremendously romantic.

In the meantime Danforth Crane had gone on to Overlook House and the family had dined by themselves. During the dinner the son had been fur-tively measuring the father as a possible antagonist. From the son's infancy there had been plenty of clashes between those two strong wills, but it had always been more or less implied that finally the father should have the casting vote and they would go on together as a matter of course. There was a situation now which indefinitely fore-shadowed a collision in which the father would not have the casting vote and after which — perhaps — they would not go on together.

Danforth meant to have Peggy Loughman. His whole mind and dreaming heart were rapt to that blissful consummation. Almost he had her now.

A few more manoeuvres, he thought, and the blow that shattered Ted Pennell would throw her into his arms. But it was now or never, and he had little doubt that his father stood between him and Ted Pennell for only his father's influence, he thought, could have thrown these various strong shields around the culprit. Finally, that might mean a clash for keeps; but he hoped not.

This was no spring-time dalliance, or young man's fancy lightly turning; but a master passion of a nature, tried, formidable man, prepared to play desperately if necessary. It must be now or never. The great point just now was that the evidence against the culprit lay mouldering in that little cemetery. In a few months it would be obliterated, and then youth might laugh at him. How to get the evidence now, and so set up an irrevocable bar against the culprit — how to do that without delivering an unforgivable frontal attack upon his father and letting his father in for a great scandal and perhaps some disagreeable experiences in criminal court?

And all unaware, Judge Crane was smiling, cracking some jokes, talking cheerfully — especially to his wife. Danforth looked over at that gentle and gracious figure, somewhat visibly under the shadow of her tragic ailment at present, and wondered how much she might know of this misty affair of Katey's disappearance. As he recalled it, this spell of physical depression had come upon his

step-mother just about the time that Katey disappeared; for about a week now she had been under the shadow.

But he speculated even more actively about the fourth person at the dinner table—dark-eyed Edith Hilton. The detective's report had brought her into his mind, for the detective had told—as hearsay, not as ascertained fact—that a closed car had left Overlook grounds about eleven o'clock that Thursday night, and its driver had been a woman. Upon hearing that Danforth had cast back in his recollection trying to recover any evidence he had as to whether or not Edith Hilton ever drove a car, or knew how to drive one. He couldn't remember ever having seen her drive one, but very likely she knew how. Like all the women, she had her infatuation for Ted Pennell—that figure of gallant youth. Along with the excitement there was a great impatience in Danforth's mind; "almost" set one's nerves tingling.

After dinner, as the four persons sat casually gossiping in the great living-room, he was always acutely aware that a significant look, a hint dropped, would draw Edith to one side or out of doors where he could talk to her. But he was a good while in making the decision. There was a sort of instinctive reluctance in his mind; he really wanted to keep to his outwardly passive rôle, if he could. Mrs. Crane went upstairs—retiring very early nowadays. The judge lingered a little and

followed her. Danforth walked across the room and seated himself beside Edith. She knew at once that he had something to say, and as though his impatience had been accumulating, like a stream behind a dam, he burst bluntly into the matter on his mind. Finesse was never his way.

"Do you know where Ted Pennell is, Edith?" he asked; and although his tone was even and subdued there was a sort of ruthless demand in the question as though she owed him the truth and he were bluntly collecting the debt.

"Not in the least, Dan," she replied. "Isn't he with his father in New York?"

Looking hard at her he was aware of her as a pretty woman, with a straight little nose and velvet eyes; but he was aware, too, of meeting her mind behind that comely mask, and he felt she was speaking the truth. He pressed on, however, without troubling to answer her question:

"Did you drive a car away from this house the night Katey disappeared?"

"Certainly not!" she answered. "I never drove a car in my life."

"Some woman did," he persisted.

"I never drove a car in my life," she repeated.

He was asking these questions like a judge on the bench, as though he had a right to and she were bound to answer. That right might arise from their long friendship — a long relationship of understanding and regard which made them in some

ways very close to each other. But to the woman's subtle mind it seemed that something else might also be tacitly implied in it — namely that the Hiltons pretty literally lived by the good-nature of the Cranes. That arrangement down in Wall Street whence the Hilton income was derived might be regarded as a sort of largess from the Cranes. In a sense, the gown on her back and the shoes on her feet were bought by Crane money. If that open hand should happen to close, it would be quite disastrous for the Hiltons. There was a sense in which Danforth might demand answers by virtue of having bought them and abundantly paid for them. She thought that, also, might be more or less in his mind. The thought provoked no particular indignation or resentment in her. She knew this burly, swarthy man very well indeed, and so knew he would be perfectly ruthless if he wanted to be. If any one owed him anything and he made up his mind to collect, he would exact to the last cent. She sort of liked him for it, too. In her experiences it had been weaklings who made most of the trouble in the world.

"I think Katey's body was in that car," said he.

"Her body!" she exclaimed, incredulous.

"I think so," he repeated. "Edith, do you know anything about that girl's disappearance? I've got to know."

"Why, Dan, I know nothing at all except what

I've said before," she replied. "I'd half forgotten it." She paused, looking eagerly at him, questioning with her eyes, but forbearing to question with her tongue because she felt that if he knew anything he would tell her of his own accord, or not at all.

"I've got to know," he said again, after a moment.

So he didn't really know, then. She revolved it in her mind a moment, studying his face, and said — not as an accusation, but as a plea — "Dan, you're going wrong. You're jealous. Yes, you're jealous."

He didn't mind her knowing that, and answered as he had before, "Well, why shouldn't I be? I've never wanted anything in the world as I want her. If I can have her, why shouldn't I? There are plenty of worse fellows than I am. . . . I'm a man of some ability, Edith. I can make the world stand aside and take off its hat to her. She don't know it now because I'm thirty-six and fat. But I can give her a whole lot more than a half-baked youngster. She'd own me. I'd study to make her happy. If she just smiled and bent her finger for it I'd fetch the end of the earth to her." He spoke more rapidly than common, with passion in his heavy voice; and a slight chokiness as he added, "If Peggy marries me she'll never regret it for a second as long as she lives. . . . Why shouldn't I have her if I can?"

"But she loves another man, Dan, who loves her," Edith reminded.

His face darkened and he flung out, "An addlepated boy — ignorant and selfish as the devil himself. He throws her away — or just drops her in the mud while he's gaping at a toy balloon. He'd break her heart for her a dozen times over. He has no right to her!"

Edith shook her head and repeated, "You're going wrong. She loves him. Say he's as addlepated and ignorant as you please — half-baked. That's partly why she loves him, you see. I know you could give her a great deal, Dan; and I don't doubt you would. If I were marrying I should choose you instead of Ted; but I shouldn't have chosen that way at twenty, and Peggy will not. At their age they own the earth. A few millions more or less doesn't count. She loves him. When he comes back and whistles the bird will go to him. He knows the tune. You're misleading yourself, Dan. I'm sorry. I'd like you to be happy."

He glowered over that for a long moment; then said, "Well, keep my secret."

"I'll certainly do that," she replied gladly.

He drew his hand over his forehead, stood up and rumbled, "Good night, Edith."

"Good night, Dan," she said.

Between the man and woman who understood each other so well those two little speeches were like a handclasp. As he lumbered out of the room

the woman felt sorry — a sorrow for him and for all the heartaches in the world, including her own. Then she fell to thinking of what he had said. What could he have meant by "Katey's body?" She wondered apprehensively if something untoward for Ted could possibly be astir. But she was perfectly sure of his innocence respecting Katey; nothing had happened about the big house. Danforth was just befooling himself — having, perhaps, heard some gossip about a closed car. That seemed the only answer and she accepted it without further question.

Danforth went upstairs, but not to relaxation and repose. The excitement in his mind persisted. Almost he had the prize. A slip now would be unbearable. Edith had said, "He will whistle to her and the bird will come; he knows the tune." There must be no such whistling. He wanted to know whether there had been an extraordinary coincidence; whether the evidence that would forever bar Ted Pennell lay up in that Stony Cove cemetery. It was natural for him to attack; aggressive instincts led him on. One man, outside of this house, did know what evidence that coffin contained. Danforth looked at his watch and found it was only a quarter to ten. Then he went to the telephone, called up Dr. Bradford McKeon, inquired whether he could see him on a matter of importance at once — or as soon as a car could take him to the doctor's house. Having the doctor's

answer, he called the garage and ordered a car to meet him on the roadway in five minutes.

He was well enough aware, during the ten-minute drive to Dr. McKeon's house, that the man he was going to see would not be a very willing witness; aware also that he was making a flank attack on his father. Dr. McKeon's place was three miles from the sea — not exactly first-chop in that opulent neighbourhood; but up there second chop was opulent enough, and this was a handsome, well-appointed house. A servant opened the door for Danforth and told him the doctor was waiting for him in his study on the second floor.

In the study the doctor shook hands with the son of his most valued client. There was no warmth in the doctor's palm; an automaton of unexceptional deportment might have shaken hands so. Danforth, from two or three inches greater height, looked down at the spare, cold man of science — aloof, supercilious in pride of intellect and pride of race — and so felt again that it was a difficult errand; but as usual he went at it head-down, speaking in his usual deliberate, even-toned rumble:

"Doctor, a maid named Katey something-or-other disappeared from my father's house last Thursday afternoon. Next day a girl was buried at Stony Cove under the name of Mina something. You signed the death-certificate. I want you to tell me whether the girl who was buried up there

is the Katey who disappeared from my father's house."

The physician experienced a disagreeable shock. He was fastidious even as to how his grizzled beard was trimmed and the precise temperature of the wine at dinner. The caller's words connoted a vulgar sort of thing—a bogus death certificate and so on—the sort of thing that greasy quacks and malpractitioners did.

"You ought to know that I never discuss my patients' affairs with any one," he replied with an icy hostility—like a priest wrapping himself up in his sacred mantel to rebuke a profane touch.

But Danforth was not to be put off with that pontifical gesture. "I've got to know just that, doctor," he said soberly. "No doubt it's my father's affair and I haven't any inclination to meddle with his affairs. On that side, if it's his affair it's my business to stand by. But there's another side. I've got an affair here, too. I've got to know what became of that maid Katey. I think you can tell me. I want you to. Certainly I am as much interested as anybody in keeping the Crane family out of a mess. You ought to know that I don't want to spill the family beans any more than anybody else does. But I've got to know what became of the maid."

Dr. McKeon put a slim hand to his trimmed beard, eyeing the caller hostilely. "If it's your father's affair," he said, "go to him."

"There are reasons why I don't want to," Danforth replied. "You can take me as my father's son and tell me what happened that night."

There was a deep line down the doctor's forehead; he stroked his beard nervously; but after a moment he answered with decision, "I know nothing about father and son. I know only my patient." Then abruptly, he stood up with a stiff little bow and added, "I must decline to discuss the affair further with you in any way."

That was checkmate. Danforth sat still a moment, undecided, and then accepted it, rising and saying, "Sorry; but if you're determined there's nothing more to be said."

The doctor repeated his stiff little bow, and as Danforth could not very well either choke him or persist in an interview which the master of the house had declared closed, he got up, rumbled, "Good night," and took himself away.

Dr. McKeon looked at the caller's broad, retreating back with hostility, and gnawed his lip a moment. There was a very decided and disagreeable commotion in his mind. He began pacing his study, with a deep line down his forehead.

So far, it was checkmate; and there was anger in Danforth's mind against the meagre, icy, supercilious man upstairs as he climbed into his waiting car. But getting mad at Dr. Bradford McKeon would do him no good. Opposition only hardened his resolution; the aggressive instincts led him on;

he proposed to find out. When the car rolled into the grounds of Overlook House he told the chauffeur to take him to the garage instead of to the house, and there he called up Mrs. Loughman's garage, asking for Mr. Eastman, the tree doctor. Mr. Eastman, in fact, had just returned from the shore dinner, and a few minutes later, as Danforth stood in the light of an electric lantern near the east end of the garage, he saw the detective's stocky figure emerging from the gloom into the electric twilight some distance up the road and started to meet him.

It was a fair but moonless night and Danforth halted at a spot where the electric still shed some rays about — the rays offering a certain protection against eavesdropping which would have been lacking further in the woods where one couldn't see whether or not a curious figure lurked behind the next tree. And in that open place he went at the affair in his mind:

"I'm going to have a look at that body up there, Eastman. Of course, I don't want the coroner mixing in it — not yet. Probably you can help me arrange it."

Eastman's own mind had been running in that same direction. Not that he intended anything in particular in the present juncture of affairs. He was a perfectly honourable detective — at present. But he hadn't a doubt that the little cemetery contained a secret which might, under cer-

tain circumstances, have a high commercial value. If he hadn't been a perfectly honourable detective he might, of course, dig up that secret and then go to Judge Tillman Crane with a persuasive argument why bank notes of large denomination or a check running into five figures should pass from the judge's hand into his own. He intended nothing whatever, but he had amused himself by speculating as to how the thing might be done. That speculation had been in his mind when he told Jenny George to keep still a while. One never could tell.

So to Danforth Crane's statement he replied good-naturedly, "Why, I guess it wouldn't be so very difficult. I find the care of that little cemetery up there is sort of farmed out to a native and his son. It ain't much of a cemetery, you know, so there ain't much in it for them. The native tells me they get fifty dollars a year for mowing the grass and trimming up the trees a bit and seeing that the fence don't fall down and three dollars and a half for digging a grave. I reckon the native would be reasonable for about ten dollars — and for twenty he'd be reasonabler than a professor of logic." Eastman smiled broadly at his own pleasantry and gave a little chuckle.

"Of course, they wouldn't stand for anything really contraband," he went on. "Any dime novel stuff — with the fear of the law — would give them cold feet. But I guess they wouldn't be hard to

handle. I could get a woman to pose as the girl's sister — Mina Stein's sister, see. She's just heard that Mina Stein was buried and has come up here from New York — a poor woman, you know, with not much money, but naturally anxious to know whether the Mina Stein is really her sister or not. If she told a good tearful story, I guess it wouldn't be much trouble to get the native and his son to accommodate her — especially as they could make ten dollars by it in an hour's work.

"That cemetery lies off the main road, you know. It isn't used a great deal now. Dr. McKeon selected a lot on the lower side where the ground dips down a bit. The lots are cheaper there — also out of sight of anybody that might happen to be passing along the country road. Probably that out-of-sightedness would appeal more or less to the native and his son, in case they should have any little misgivings about exhuming a body without an official order. But why should they have any misgivings at all? The body wouldn't be removed, but only exhumed and reburied, in order to satisfy the natural wish of a bereaved sister — and for ten dollars cash. I think it can all be arranged with little trouble. Two husky men ought to do it in half an hour or less; the dirt is still soft."

"Arrange it for tomorrow night," said Danforth.

"There's one point," Eastman remarked — a point, in fact, which he had thought about. "I've

got a snapshot picture of the maid, but it would be better if somebody was there who could identify her."

Danforth considered that, and asked, "This woman that you speak of — you know her? Is she dependable?"

"Perfectly," Eastman replied. "I'll answer for her."

"I can be there myself," said Danforth. "Could you account for me to the native and his son?"

"Well, that can be arranged too," Eastman replied. "You and the woman can keep to one side — out of the way — while the digging is going on. You can put on a rough coat and pull a slouch hat over your brows. I can arrange the lights to suit myself. There'll just be a lantern, you know. All you'll need is one good look — one minute. I'm sure we can fix it. Of course we might depend on the picture and verbal description; but somebody ought to be there who knew her and can identify her."

"Certainly," Danforth replied. "I'll be there myself. You make the arrangements and notify me where to come, and when."

Eastman went back to his lodging very well pleased. If it should fall out that one finally decided to leave off being a perfectly honourable detective, this identification of the body by Danforth Crane wouldn't hurt one's case at all.



X

LUCK AND LESTER HILTON

THERE were many cemeteries in that region. Outside the cities, the dead, it seemed, equalled the living in number. The particular cemetery near Stony Cove contained only an acre of ground. It was enclosed by a picket fence, long unpainted. A sacred text was inscribed on the pine arch over the gate, but it had become so dim that except with a good light one could not make it out. The gate faced a country road, not in very good condition and shunned by ordinary traffic. From that side the ground rose in a gentle undulation, and then fell away so that even by standing up in a wagon a passenger on the road could not see the further side of the burying ground.

Over on that further side two coatless men were industriously plying their spades by the light of a lantern on a clear and moonless night. Eastman had placed the lantern against a tree so as to screen its rays somewhat. He sat at the foot of the tree watching the diggers. Two rods away a woman in a cheap dark dress sat on an old fallen headstone also watching the diggers. Some distance from her a burly man, whose slouch hat was pulled over his

brows, leaned against a tree — also silently watching. These two detached figures were hardly visible in the mellow summer night. The spades plied noiselessly in the soft earth. Even the birds and the myriad tiny creatures to whom this spot belonged after dark were hardly aware of the intrusion.

The diggers knew their job and worked diligently, slowly descending into the ground as a long mound of yellow earth grew higher beside the excavation they were making. It seemed to take time — especially to the burly man leaning against the tree. He was not given to “nerves,” but a little stir and skurry in the grass behind him affected him unpleasantly — some small beasts come to see what was the matter, perhaps. He felt in his pockets, squatted down and lit a cigarette — mindful that the flame of his match might possibly be seen from the road.

The digging went on. The two men were down to their knees. One of them wiped his forehead on his shirt sleeve and spoke to Eastman, who moved the lantern to the edge of the excavation in order that they might see better. Gradually they sank to their hips. Eastman tied a bit of rope to the lantern and lowered it into the hole, making his end of the rope fast to a rude wooden tressel which lay on the ground. The mound of yellow earth grew apace. The men were down to their shoulders. Then, as they stooped to drive in the spade,

their heads disappeared from the watching woman's vision. Eastman was standing at the edge of the grave, watching — somehow like a grim fisherman ready with the gaff. . . .

The digging was over, it seemed. Eastman was handing that rude wooden tressel down into the grave — two such tressels, in fact. Then he was giving directions, or exchanging comments, in subdued tones, with the older of the two men below him. A little later the watching woman saw him step over to the discarded coat of one of the two diggers from which he took something that he handed down into the grave. She thought it was a screw driver. He stepped back, looked in her direction and in the direction of the burly man and made a beckoning gesture.

As she arose, the figure of the man detached itself from the tree to her right. They approached the grave together. Looking down she saw that the coffin had been lifted up on the two tressels so that the top of it was only a couple of feet below the ground level. The lid had been removed. She saw the form of a girl and a fair face waxen in the mystery and majesty of death. . . .

She was aware that the burly man beside her stepped back from the brink of the grave, and she turned her head to catch what he should say, if he said anything. He lifted a big hand, pushing up his hat brim and drew the hand across his brow, apparently not minded to say anything; but when

Miss George whispered to him, "The girl?" he rumbled back, "Yes," and with that turned abruptly and tramped away, almost immediately fading out of their sight in the dark.

The lantern being in the grave, Miss George's face was only a white blur to Eastman's eyes; but he guessed the question she had asked. She looked down again, not without human pity. Eastman spoke to the men below: "All right, cover it up."

Then Miss George went back to her seat on the fallen headstone and Eastman stood by while the workmen reburied the coffin. Finally she and Eastman followed the diggers out of the little cemetery. At the gate she thanked them. Eastman thanked them also and placed a more substantial evidence of appreciation in the father's calloused palm. Shouldering their spades, father and son tramped down the road, well satisfied with their nocturnal enterprise. Eastman and Miss George followed more slowly, well satisfied also. All had gone prosperously, unwitnessed under night's kindly mantle save by the little fluttering, creeping things. Tomorrow only a sharp eye could detect that the sod on a new grave had been relaid.

And as Eastman and Miss George looked at it this altered the Cordwainer problem. Danforth Crane had been duly warned and had ignored the warning. A means of protection had been pointed out to him and he had refused to take it. Moreover he had ordered the body exhumed. Every

step of that kind naturally increased the probability of stirring up an inquiry and touching off a disclosure. If the disclosure did come now Cordwainer could very plausibly wash his hands of it — and with the other hand collect a handsome fee from Lester Hilton for having solved his mystery for him. There was no longer any reason why Miss George should remain in that neighbourhood. She could disappear, and the employer of Cordwainer's right hand need not know that his left hand had been employed in the same case.

That was the way it looked to the two professionals, and — as it was too late to make a connection for New York that night — Miss George was to take the nine-something train for Boston next morning, which would get her to New York that evening, where she would lay the situation before Cordwainer for final instructions.

Waiting for the nine-something train on the long platform at Windham next morning, a suitcase and bag at her feet, Miss George heard the locomotive whistle. Generally she preferred waiting at the edge of a crowd rather than in the thick of it, and while other passengers caught up their hand baggage at the whistle she stood composedly, for she was never in a hurry unless she was compelled to be; generally there was plenty of time without crowding. So as the train was pulling up to the platform she saw a smart automobile dash into the station yard, turn and stop with a sharp

application of brakes. Immediately the chauffeur sprang down from his seat, a suitcase in his hand, and turned to open the tonneau door. But his passenger had already opened the door and was stepping out, putting forth a pretty foot in a tan shoe. The passenger was a slim young lady, in a simple, dainty tan-coloured waist and skirt, with a little coat to match over her arm.

Miss George instantly recognized her and was in less of a hurry than ever. Miss Peggy Loughman was taking a journey,—perhaps down the coast a way to some country house for a visit; but in that case she would probably have gone by auto. Perhaps it was to Boston. Miss George waited while the slim passenger glided past, climbed the car platform and took her suitcase from the chauffeur's hand. Then Miss George—carrying her own baggage—entered that car and found a seat behind Miss Loughman. With perfect impartiality, Miss George admired the girl—an admirable embodiment of youth and grace, beauty and style. It was even warmer than mere impartiality. The detective woman—herself thirty-five and of full figure—impersonally loved the girl for embodying youth and beauty. But she was curious to know where Miss Loughman was going.

In the terminal station at Boston, when Miss Loughman gracefully waited—as a matter of course—for somebody to come and carry her bag, Miss George waited also, and declined the service

of a porter, although her baggage was heavy, in order to follow the slim figure in tan skirt. She was able to overhear Miss Loughman say to her porter, as he touched his cap in acknowledgment of her coins, and also of herself for he was human too:

"Yes, South Station."

And the porter duly conveyed that direction to the taxicab driver — with a touch of superiority, as though for the moment he were invested with this young lady's quality and spoke down, from her elevation, to the mere menial who drove the cab. So Miss Loughman was going to New York. Miss George had no idea that that meant anything in particular, but it was just as well to know it. She made no attempt to trace Miss Loughman further. In fact, as they sat in different cars during the journey from Boston she had fairly forgotten her fellow traveller when she alighted from the train in New York, her mind busy with the report which she had to make to Cordwainer, and with speculating as to what course he would direct her to take on the morrow. Which meant, in plain English, whether he would direct her to make a truthful report to Lester Hilton — and so take the chance of being discovered in a course of conduct inimical to the interests of his valued clients the Cranes — or decide that the report should be of a more or less veiled and fanciful nature.

Other inimical factors were at play in Lester

Hilton's affairs on that morrow. Hidalgo Petroleum had dismally sagged on downward, pulling Hilton's heart and nerves down with it. About half past ten that morning Hilton took up one of the six labelled telephones that stood ranged on a narrow shelf beside his desk and asked for a quotation on Hidalgo. The answer came back, "Just sold at a hundred and nine." Still lower! Which pulled his heart a notch further down.

Edward Pennell, Senior, was stepping out of an elevator then. Crossing the corridor, he entered the office — somewhat late, perhaps, for the head of a brokerage firm; but he seldom confined himself to regular office hours. The large, pleasantly furnished main room, with its air of a not-much-frequented club parlour had its usual aspect of quietness and leisure, the last spot that an uninitiated person would have picked out as the site of a volcano that was about to erupt. A little stoop-shouldered, Mr. Pennell cast his usual absent-minded gaze about the room and turned to open the door at the left to take a bare glance at the posted Stock Exchange quotations from which he noted, without particular interest, that the big market was heavy. He then went on to his private room where he paused a moment to take an affectionate look at the two Zorn etchings before seating himself at the fine desk.

The mail awaiting him there comprised only three letters. One of them immediately caught his eye

—addressed to himself in a heavy, sprawling hand. He smiled a little as he cut the envelope with a curiously carved silver blade which he used for a letter opener. The two sheets inside were scrawled over in the same heavy hand; but the stationery was of the finest and the top of the sheets bore the engraved imprint, "Overlook House." Up at Windham, Judge Crane liked grooms much better than secretaries. He did as little business as possible, and once in a while, when he had something of a business nature on his mind he just sat down and scribbled a letter himself without bothering to send for a stenographer. That was why Pennell smiled a little when he saw this letter.

It was a business letter, expressed as briefly as possible — so briefly that an outsider could hardly have guessed the meaning at times. A few words and figures near the close especially arrested Pennell's attention. They were as follows:

"See what market there would be for \$5,000,000. Alph debts in your hands. Try Wolcott."

So far as Pennell knew there were not five million dollars of Alpha Oil debentures in his firm's hands. He was quite sure that the last time he looked at it over half those debentures had been withdrawn. Of course, the judge might have put other debentures in their hands since then and the circumstance not have been reported to him. Or the judge might have forgotten. He touched a button on his desk and when an office boy appeared

said, "Ask Mr. Marvin to step here." Another figure appeared, after a moment, to which the senior partner said: "Give me the amount of Alpha Oil debentures, belonging to Judge Crane, now in our hands."

That figure disappeared for the space of two minutes and, returning, silently handed Pennell a slip of paper on which was pencilled, "\$2,250,000."

"Thank you," said Pennell, and the figure retired again.

The senior partner felt disturbed and frowned a bit as he absently fingered a close-cropped grey-ing sidewhisker. He re-read the letter. Not only had the judge written five million, but the letter showed that the transaction which he had in view would involve some such sum. Certainly he had five million in mind when he wrote. Could he have forgotten that more than half the debentures had been withdrawn? It was annoying. Pennell liked everything about his office to fit perfectly and come out exactly right. He frowned over this a moment, worrying his sidewhisker. Then he got up, taking the judge's letter in his hand, went to the main room and crossed to Hilton's den. But Hilton, with that leaden pull on his nerves, had slipped out of the office one minute before to comfort himself with a drink. Never before had he yielded in the forenoon.

Seeing Hilton's office empty, Pennell went over to the office manager's desk in the corner of the

main room, saying, "Will you come into my room a moment, Preston"; and led the way thither.

In his own room Pennell showed Preston Judge Crane's letter and Marvin's pencilled memorandum, and remarked with a puzzled frown, "The judge may have forgotten; but it's rather odd that he should forget. I wish you would check the account up yourself — see just when the debentures were withdrawn and look over our vouchers for them, so we can make a complete statement." He hesitated a moment, for there was here some little hint of that odious thing, a traitor and thief in the office. To his mind it was only the barest hint; but he added, "Look it up yourself, Preston, and let me know what you find." If Hilton had been in the office, Pennell would have asked him to look it up personally.

When Hilton stepped in, fifteen minutes later, the office boy met him with a verbal message: "Mr. Pennell would like to see you in his room, Mr. Hilton."

It was a disagreeable message to Hilton. He had eaten a couple of cloves, but he feared that, at close range, the senior partner might detect an odour of liquor on his breath — which was bad form at eleven o'clock in the morning. At the threshold of Pennell's room he saw that wiry, alert, bespectacled little Preston was with the senior partner. An instant later he noticed that several printed slips of paper were lying on Pennell's desk.

Approaching the desk, he got a better view of those slips, and his mind misgave.

In stealing Judge Crane's debentures two methods had been open to him. By the simplest method he would simply have taken the debentures out of the strong box in the safe deposit vaults in the basement and made off with them, saying nothing to anybody. But his uneasy mind conjured up immanent dangers in that method. Any one of the three members of the firm might have access to that strong box at any time, and it contained many other securities than Judge Crane's. At the end of the month, Marvin, the cashier, checked over its contents under the eye of some member of the firm. If their books showed five million dollars of Alpha Oil debentures, belonging to Judge Crane, and the strong box contained only four million, three million, or two and a quarter million — as the embezzlements progressed — that discrepancy might be detected.

Hilton chose, therefore, a more elaborate method, which consisted in reporting to Marvin the withdrawal of the judge's debentures as he took them out of the strong box. Marvin entered the withdrawals on his books, therefore, and the books showed only as many debentures as the strong box actually contained. But when Marvin charged off customers' securities as having been withdrawn by the customer from the firm's keeping, he took a voucher for them in the form of a receipt signed

by the customer. So in withdrawing debentures, Hilton signed Judge Crane's name to a corresponding receipt which the cashier duly filed away. Hilton made no attempt to imitate the judge's signature, but signed in his own usual hand. The cashier knew, of course, that Hilton signed the receipts, but Hilton was a member of the firm and the cashier took it for granted that he had the judge's authorization to sign the receipt. Having his voucher in due form, the cashier thought no more about it; it was not for him to question what members of the firm did. When Preston asked for the vouchers in respect of Judge Crane's debentures, Marvin handed them over with the casual remark, "Mr. Hilton signed them." So there they lay now on Pennell's desk.

Pennell was frowning; the affair was most irregular and annoying; it was even alarming in view of Judge Crane's letter.

"You've been signing Judge Crane's name to those receipts for Alpha Oil debentures," he said, with a glance at the printed slips on his desk.

Abruptly confronted with an issue of life or death, Hilton sat down, and replied, evenly, "Yes." . . . How much did they know?

"It's damned irregular, Lester," the senior partner observed, irritably. "How did you come to do it?"

That sounded rather reassuring to Hilton—as though they had merely stumbled on the irregu-

larly-signed vouchers. "Why, the judge hasn't been here, you know," he answered. "He telephoned about the debentures. I signed the receipts just to keep the records straight."

Pennell frowned down at the slips, noted a date and observed, "But he was here in May. This first receipt for half a million is dated in May."

"Why, he telephoned," Hilton replied, as though the persistent questioning rather offended him. "I didn't think it worth while to insist that he come down here to the office and sign a receipt personally. I thought Judge Crane was a sufficiently important customer so that we could afford to accommodate him in as small a matter as that."

Certainly the judge was a sufficiently important customer; but Pennell had reason to suppose that he himself was more in the judge's confidence, as to important business affairs, than Hilton was. The answer didn't satisfy him. "What became of the debentures?" he asked. "I don't find that we've been selling any of them."

The questions came too fast for Hilton. If Pennell would stop talking for five minutes and give him a chance to think up a consistent story! But he had to answer, on the spur of the moment, as best he could,

"I've turned them over to the Exchange Bank, as the judge directed," he said. "I suppose he's been using them there as collateral."

Now Judge Crane's scrawled letter to Pennell

mentioned that the writer had a million or so loose cash in hand. Why would a man with a million or so in loose cash be pledging two and three-quarter millions of debentures at the Exchange Bank for a loan?

Hilton perceived that his answer struck a discordant note somewhere, and he hastened to add, "Part of them I turned over to Danforth. In fact, it was on Danforth's instructions that I took them out. It's always been understood he was authorized to act for the judge to any extent and in any case."

That was true enough; Danforth's authorization would be sufficient. But Danforth had been in town nearly all the while. From the window of this room one could throw a stone and hit the building in which Danforth had his office. So Pennell objected, warmly, "Danforth ought to have signed the receipts himself, then."

Hilton shrugged his shoulders and retorted, "It isn't worth while to bother people of that kind with clerical formalities. Let them do any way they want to. Of course, Danforth and his father act together. What one does, the other does."

But that brought up another difficulty in Mr. Pennell's mind. "I don't know why Danforth should be borrowing a couple of million or more now," he said. "The judge writes me that he's got a million or so on hand." He took up the judge's letter, and with deeper irritation added,

"The judge himself thinks he's got five million of Alpha Oil debentures in our hands. This letter says so."

The earth rather caved in under Lester Hilton then. In spite of himself he swallowed and wetted his lips with the tip of his tongue. "Danforth's forgotten to tell him," he said.

"But the judge himself has withdrawn part of the debentures you say," Pennell retorted.

"It slipped the judge's mind," said Hilton. "Are you sure he says five million?"

"Certainly. There's no doubt whatever about it," Pennell replied, glancing at the letter. "The context of his letter shows that he must have had about five million in mind, and the figures are plain enough."

"It's slipped his mind," Hilton repeated.

"It's damned irregular, Hilton; I don't like it," Pennell declared — dropping the more intimate given name. Turning to Preston he said, "Call up Danforth. See if he is in his office."

The telephone, in fact, was rather more convenient to his hand than to Preston's; but it would be rather like him to tell Preston to do it. That enabled Hilton to score — which he did by remarking, "Danforth is up at Windham this week."

It was a point in his favour because it suggested that he was closer to the Cranes' affairs than Pennell was. A far greater point was that Danforth's absence deprived them of any immediate witness

against him. He noted, however, that notwithstanding his declaration Preston went ahead with his telephoning, asking the operator in the outer room to get Mr. Danforth Crane's office for him.

That made a delay of two minutes. Pennell sat frowning and worrying a side whisker. Preston looked at the rug. Hilton tried to think out further lines of defence, but could not. Then the answer came that Danforth Crane was not in town, but at Windham. Hilton grasped desperately at that advantage and assumed a more aggressive air.

"What's all this commotion about, anyway?" he demanded. "You're acting as though my signature wasn't sufficient. Isn't my statement that the judge and Danforth authorized the withdrawal of the debentures enough? What do you want? An affidavit?"

But Pennell was too deeply disturbed by the affair to be put off with that. "It's damned irregular," he iterated. "It's certain that Judge Crane thinks he's got five million Alpha Oil debentures here. He might forget small change, but he isn't apt to forget two and three quarter millions. . . . I'll call him up at Windham. If he isn't at the house just now he'll be in at luncheon time. I want to get this straightened out."

That, of course, would be fatal. At any cost Hilton must gain time. He spoke up sharply, "See here, Pennell, if we're going to have a row in

this family, for heaven's sake let's keep it to ourselves. Let's wash our dirty linen at home. Do you want Judge Crane to think this is a firm not to be trusted? You call him up and say, 'Hilton has signed your name to some receipts. He says he had your authority, but I don't believe him.' You might as well shut up the shop. I'll go up to Windham tonight. My wife is there. It will be just a week-end visit to her. But I'll take along a receipt for these debentures and I'll have the judge sign it — just in order to iron out a little informality. I'll bring it back here with his signature — and Danforth's, too, if you say so. For God's sake let's do our family washing indoors."

That sounded rather reasonable to the senior partner. "Very well," he said. "Bring back the judge's signature — or Danforth's."

"I will," said Hilton, rising.

When he had gone out the other two partners looked at each other. "I don't like it," said the senior partner, his brow wrinkled.

Very significantly the junior partner replied, "I don't like it either."

"Well," Pennell concluded after a moment's troubled reflection, "we'll give him a chance to get the judge's signature."

When Preston returned to his desk in the corner of the big room, Hilton was talking with a customer who had intercepted him. Preston was

obliged to pass near them, but he kept his eyes downcast, not looking at Hilton. And Hilton, duly noting that, thought bitterly, "They don't believe me; they've got their thumbs down."

The precipice, it seemed, was just ahead. A horror sat on his mind when he retired to his own room. . . . He might manage to forge Judge Crane's name to the receipt. That idea had flashed in his brain when he proposed going to Windham. But they were suspicious, now; thumbs down. Forging the judge's name to a receipt would answer for only a little while. He hadn't the heart to ask again what Hidalgo Petroleum was then. It was fatal to him anyway. . . . He thought of suicide. But as he stood by the window looking out the great sun poured down upon the great city — lighting thronged, canyon streets that threaded gigantic, grotesque, impossible piles of steel and stone which loomed into the sky at every hand; a city such as no one had ever imagined before, the farthest expression of man's audacity — and very beautiful in that way for all the architects might say. This teeming and towering region, into a segment of which Hilton looked, the money mart of a continent and of half the world, was also the city of his dreams. He felt it as he stood by the window, and felt poignantly that he loved to live. . . .

He turned mechanically to the tinkling telephone

and took it up to listen. The voice sounded strange at first; but immediately he caught the name his heart leapt.

"Oh, yes. . . . She is?" he said eagerly. . . .
"Good! Tell her to come over her right away. Tell her to take the elevator up to the nineteenth floor and go to room 1912. There's no sign on the door, but I will be there in ten minutes waiting for her. Ten minutes. Room 1912. She can open the door and walk right in."

Hilton put down the telephone with a fever heat in his brain. Maybe luck was going to grant him a saving favour after all! He waited five minutes by the clock on his desk, then took the elevator up to his secret room. A few minutes later Miss George stepped in. His eager eyes gathered no notion of the forthcoming report from her composed face; but he got the usual impression of a little secret amusement on her part over a funny world as she shook hands with him.

"Well, Mr. Hilton, I've found your girl," she began composedly, as she sat down—for so Cordwainer had decided. In that time her cool glance had taken in the room.

"She was killed in Judge Crane's house. Her body was taken down to the laundry and carried away from the house in a closed car that evening. It was taken to Dr. Bradford McKeon's house and buried the next afternoon in a little cemetery up by Stony Cove. Dr. McKeon issued a death cer-

tificate giving the cause of the death as heart failure. He told the undertaker the girl was a maid who had been employed in his house and died suddenly and he told his servants she was a patient who had been sent there during the night and died." She said it quite calmly.

"You're sure of this?" he exclaimed when he got his breath.

"Sure," she replied. "I saw her myself."

"How?" he jerked out the word, his excited mind grappling for the facts.

"I had her dug up," Miss George answered. "Privately, you understand. There hasn't been a ripple on the surface yet. The girl had been misused. There's a bruise on her cheek where she had been struck and marks on her throat where she had been choked. Her hair is pulled down and her dress seems to have been torn at the breast. Of course, it would take an autopsy to tell just what killed her."

He groped a moment and repeated, "Dr. McKeon's certificate said heart failure?"

"Yes," she replied with an amused little smile; "a person's heart generally does fail after they've been choked hard enough, or if they've been stabbed or shot. You see, this is a cheap coffin. The lid comes off in two parts. They can take off the top part and give mourners a chance to view the remains—uncovered down nearly to the waist. We took off only the top part. A white cloth, prob-

ably a sheet, had been laid over the girl up to her breast. Whether there are any blood stains below I don't know. Naturally I didn't care to linger round there any longer than was necessary to make the identification. It was at night, but somebody might have come along asking questions."

"But you're sure of the identification?" he persisted.

"Absolutely," she replied. "I got a good look at two pictures of her — besides the descriptions. There's no doubt about it." That detail of identification by photographs Cordwainer had also decided upon.

For a moment Hilton was half amazed over it, for he had not really expected anything as raw as this.

"You see, the butler up there says the girl telephoned him about three o'clock in the afternoon that she wasn't coming back," Miss George reminded him. "But about five o'clock she was lying in the laundry. That was over a week ago. She hasn't been heard from. Her clothes are still at the house. Mail still comes there for her. Next morning Dr. Bradford McKeon goes down to Windham and buys a cheap coffin, saying it's for a maid employed in his house; but no such maid has been employed in his house. One of Judge Crane's trucks hauls the coffin away from the undertaker shop. Dr. McKeon tells his own servants the dead

girl in his house is a patient that's been brought there during the night. She's buried in an out-of-the-way cemetery and she's absolutely the same girl who disappeared from Judge Crane's house. There isn't a flaw in it, Mr. Hilton."

"It took somebody with a pull to do all that," he commented.

"Judge Crane himself probably had a hand in it," she replied. "It don't look as though anybody else could have dragged Dr. McKeon into it and pulled the other wires. The butler, for example — he must have known what had happened and it's hardly likely he wouldn't have told the judge. Looks to me as though the judge himself must have worked it."

He pondered it a moment, looked significantly over at her and asked, "Did you happen to hear anything further of young Pennell up there?"

"He hadn't put in an appearance up to the time I left," she replied.

Still looking significant he commented, "His father doesn't know he's left Windham."

"Well, there it stands, Mr. Hilton," she observed, as though in conclusion. "Your girl is up there in the little cemetery. That's sure. You can get her any time you want. An autopsy will show what killed her. But whatever did kill her there's a nice mess of concealing the real cause of her death and burying her under an assumed name with a 'phony' death certificate."

After a moment he said, with conviction, "They'd never have done that if she had died a natural death."

"Well, not unless they're lunatics," she replied. And after a slight pause she added, "If there's going to be an official investigation, I don't want to figure in it. There's no need, you know, and the less I show my hand the better. But if you want somebody to start off an official investigation I can arrange it for you." That, too, Cordwainer had decided — lest his embarrassing dual role in the matter be disclosed.

"How would you go about it?" he asked.

"Oh, half a dozen ways," she replied easily. "The local officers are usually keen enough to look up a sensation — same's an actress getting on a front page, you know. It's no trouble to start an investigation. There's a gardener up there at Judge Crane's named Louis — a simple minded mutt who was in love with Katey. Probably if a word was slipped to him that Katey had been murdered and buried under an assumed name he'd demand an investigation. Of course you could go straight to the sheriff if you wanted to. You've got plenty to go on. And it's all right there. Just exhume the body and the beans are spilled."

"Well — I don't know that I want an investigation," he said. "I'm not in the police business."

"No," she replied, good-naturedly.

"But you're sure?" he insisted.

"Absolutely sure," she affirmed. "You can ask Mr. Cordwainer." With that she arose.

Rising also he wished to enjoin absolute secrecy upon her, but of course that was superfluous and would sound foolish, so he simply bade her good day. She went out, leaving him alone with his febrile exultation.

It was bigger than he had hoped for. Murder, secret burial, false death certificate, the proof of it under his hand, needing only exhumation of the body! It was so big that he could hardly believe it. Presently he turned to the telephone, but put the instrument down again without lifting the receiver. Telephoning wouldn't do. He went down to the street, walked up Park Row to the dingy and ancient building which housed Cordwainer and soon was sitting in the small room looking hard across the corner of a battered desk at the meagre detective chief who was in his shirt sleeves as usual and as unable to keep still as ever — his constant little movements suggesting a hawk settling its feathers.

"Miss George has just made a report to me," Hilton said. "I suppose you know what it is."

Cordwainer nodded, put a hand to his close-cropped grizzled beard, stirred a bit in his chair.

"It's terribly important to me," Hilton went on. "Do you think I can depend absolutely on it — absolutely — the identification and all?"

"I'd bet my life on it," said Cordwainer, with another nod. "I'd risk my neck on it." His conviction was so complete that it convinced Hilton.

"Well, I wanted to be sure," he said.

"Bet my neck on it," Cordwainer repeated, twisting the point of his beard, nodding.

Hilton went out convinced and exulting. He had them! The embezzlement of some debentures was a rather small matter in comparison with the murder of a girl! He felt armoured in brass, superior, almost contemptuous. Back in his own office he walked over to Preston's desk, easily, almost jauntily, not avoiding the junior partner's eyes but challenging them.

"By the way," he said with a casual air, "have that receipt for the debentures drawn up, will you? Save me the bother of writing one out when I get up there."

He turned away, smiling like a man content and at ease, to speak to a customer.



XI

THE AMATEUR BLACKMAILER

WHEN the day's work was done Hilton took his usual course by subway to Fourteenth Street and up Fifth Avenue in his car; and he gave himself a credit mark because he resisted the temptation to take a drink until he reached his club. Of late alcohol had become more and more necessary to him.

In the breast pocket of his coat a blank envelope contained a folded slip of paper — the receipt for two million seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars of Alpha Oil debentures which Judge Crane should sign — or Danforth. There were moments when those figures amazed him. Two and three quarters millions of dollars! That was a fine fortune, such a fortune as he had dreamed of possessing, and he had lost it without ever having had it! The possession of only one million would have delighted him, and here he was asking somebody to cancel a debt nearly three-fold that. In seeking his prize he had gone backward with the velocity of a comet! At moments it seemed all a fantasy, a trick of the brain, and he asked himself with incredulous astonishment how he could have lost such

a huge sum. Only by sitting down, concentrating his thought and making rigorous drafts on his memory could he have retraced the many operations through which the loss accrued. And he couldn't sit down and concentrate his thought; the swirl and flux in his mind refused that orderly process. . . . The money had just run through his fingers.

Behind the exultation at escaping from an imminent danger lay — obscurely and uneasily — a realization of his true position. He was going to save his neck; that was all. His neck once saved he would be back again where he started from, or worse. He was thirty-five years old and what he had won was just escape from ruin. Aside from that he stood pretty much at zero. A sense of that lay darkly in the back of his mind. He hastened to the bar for the liquid drug that would flatter him into forgetting it.

About dinner time he sent his wife a night telegram saying simply that he was coming up for the week end and added, "Don't bother to meet me." He wanted, cunningly, to take them unaware. When he alighted from the train at Windham station next forenoon, no one was there to meet him, and he blamed his wife for it, with a touch of gall, saying she cared not at all whether he came or not. He took a cab to Overlook House and as the vehicle neared the beginning of the long dressed-stone wall that enclosed Judge Crane's grounds on the

side next the public road he noticed that the automobile ahead of him was turning in through the tall wrought iron gate — another morning caller, apparently. This automobile was standing by the west entrance to the house when his cab drew up there.

Benjamin answered his ring, took his bag and responded to his question with, "Yes, sir; out on the terrace." He walked through the hall therefore to the broad, brick-paved terrace on the sea front of the house, and immediately experienced a precious sense of relief.

Ever since he woke up that morning he had been screwing up his courage desperately, saying to himself that he would go straight at Judge Crane the moment he arrived and have it over with. That would create a disagreeable situation and doubtless he would have to leave the house immediately after his interview, but he could pretend to his wife that he received a telephone message which made it necessary for him to return to New York at once. The great thing was to have it over with quickly. But when he stepped out on the terrace he saw four figures sitting in the shade there — Judge Crane, Mrs. Crane, Dr. Bradford McKeon and his own wife. So it was Dr. McKeon's car that had preceded him to the house and there could be no immediate going at the judge — wherefore he experienced a decided sense of relief.

His wife came to meet him, dutifully kissing

him. Mrs. Crane said, "Hello, Lester," smiling and holding out her nice hand. Dr. McKeon stood up, with a formal little bow and shook hands like an automaton. The judge lazily, but hospitably held up a big hand saying, "Hello, Lester," and smiling. Hilton gathered that Dr. McKeon was there professionally. His wife had been sitting apart from the other three, her deft fingers busy with a bit of embroidery. Hilton took a chair near her, apart from the other three, so as not to intrude upon the professional business. His wife asked him a perfunctory question or two — whether he had found it warm on the train; whether he'd been staying at the Riverside Drive apartment or at his little place on Fifty-eighth Street — and then went on with her embroidery. He was well enough aware of her as her dark head bent over the bit of cloth at which her pretty fingers worked deftly, and aware, in her silence, that he was much farther off from her than from the three figures down the terrace. But he was principally engaged with one of those figures — the tall gangling judge, his hair thrust up aggressively above his square forehead and his rugged face deeply seamed as he listened carefully to what Dr. McKeon was saying. It was not a figure that invited attack. A sense of the old man's power chilled Hilton's mind. He lighted a cigar and made some casual remarks to his wife about the weather and the attractiveness of the view — which she as casually answered.

Presently Dr. McKeon arose and Hilton's nerves tightened in a stage-struck fashion; but the judge arose also and walked down the terrace with the doctor. The two disappeared into the house. Hilton waited five minutes, but the judge did not reappear. "Well, I believe I'll take a stroll," he said, getting up. He knew he was putting it off; but he had to put it off.

Judge Crane was talking to Dr. McKeon about his wife's condition, which had been less satisfactory than usual for several days. The doctor was replying professionally. The two men halted mechanically in the big hall. The doctor repeated some professional observations. He then glanced around, stroked his beard and said,

"Judge, Danforth has been to me about that maid, Katey."

The lines in the judge's face deepened. "Been to you? How do you mean?" he asked, his throaty tones as usual grating a bit as though the organs of speech needed oiling.

"He knows," said the doctor, "that the day after she disappeared a girl was buried in Stony Cove cemetery under a death certificate signed by me. He demanded that I tell him whether that girl was the same maid who left your house."

"What did you tell him?" the judge demanded.

"I told him nothing whatever," Dr. McKeon replied with an icy decisiveness. "I told him that I never discussed any affair of a patient with any

one. I also told him that if he had any questions to ask about your affairs he must go to you."

"When was this?" the judge asked.

"Two evenings ago," Dr. McKeon replied. "I decided then not to mention it to you. It's a family matter between you and him with which I have nothing to do. . . . But he knows something of the circumstances of the burial. If he should talk to anybody else it might, of course, be unfortunate. I think it best to let you know."

"I'll take it up with him as soon as I see him," said the judge, who was not a putter-off. "Glad you told me."

"I thought it best," the doctor repeated, frostily, and walked stiffly away toward the door and his waiting car.

The frost in his mind was for the judge, too. He never tried to disguise from himself that the Cranes — excepting the second wife, his patient — were a vulgar family. But they were making him rich and he proposed to be rich. The handsome place three miles away would have been beyond his means save for this rude and prodigal client. And a dead servant, save as a possible subject of scientific research, counted for very little in his philosophy.

The judge rejoined his wife on the terrace, waiting for Danforth to appear, and was there when Hilton returned from his stroll. The stroll had taken him only down to the rocky rim of the sea

shore where he had stood a little while watching the waves dash over the boulders below. One fear—the fear of the judge—drove him away from the house. Another fear connected with that slip of paper in his pocket, pulled him back to the house. In sight of the judge, he wanted to go away; out of his sight he wanted to go back. So he did go back, but as soon as the big lean figure was well under his eye he shied away from it—passing on and entering the house. “After luncheon,” he said to himself; but knew he was flinching.

He crossed the hall and stood staring out of a window on the west side when he saw a burly figure coming up the road from the direction of the stables—Danforth. His nerves fell into a tumult. Someway Danforth—almost his own age—seemed more human, more familiar, less formidable than the judge. Hilton watched the figure approach, his brain whirling. Abruptly he dashed away to the dining room and up to the sideboard, where he poured himself out a huge drink of whisky and gulped it down. When he returned to the west end of the hall Danforth was only half a dozen rods away, and the liquor was infusing courage in his brain.

“Hello, Lester,” said Danforth, stepping in, and casually extended his hand.

Hilton gripped the hand, not at once relinquishing it, and said, “Can you come up stairs with me

a few minutes? I've got something I want to talk to you about."

With a mild surprise, but noticing the excitement in the other man's eyes and tone, Danforth replied, "Why, certainly," and moved on toward the stairs. Hilton accompanied him up the broad stairs silently, but every nerve jumping. He'd taken the plunge. He was in for it now. By the time they reached the judge's study, or den, into which Danforth led the way, the alcohol was helping. He turned to shut the door behind them, which Danforth apparently would have left open. The two men sat down, Danforth at ease and mildly wondering.

"I've had rotten luck, Dan," Hilton began plaintively; "hellish luck. Everything has gone wrong. It started back with Merged Motors. You know what happened to that. I was in half a dozen other things when that slump struck the market. Then I went into Hidalgo Petroleum up to my neck. I thought that was sure. Then I got. . . . It would take an essay to tell it all. I'm fearfully in the hole." Once started, he blurted it out in a jumble, corresponding with the jumble in his mind. "You know how it is," he urged; "once a fellow gets going wrong in that damned market there's no bottom."

Danforth knew very well how it was for fellows that got to going wrong in that damned market — having often observed it with more or less cynical

amusement. What had happened to Hilton was substantially as clear to him as though he had an elaborate detailed statement. He came at once to the main point:

"How much?"

Hilton had a confused idea of counting up the losses piecemeal, leading to the climax with careful explanations. But instead he blurted, "Two million."

Danforth had by no means expected that, and for a moment he regarded the penitent very soberly, knowing well enough that Lester Hilton had no two millions of his own to lose. "How did you manage it?" he asked quietly—as being more courteous than asking, "Whose money have you lost?"

Hilton got out his cigarette case. The fingers that held the match so trembled that it was difficult for him to get a light. And having thereby gained a little time, he said, "I've used some of the judge's Alpha Oil debentures."

"Two million?" Danforth asked.

Hilton looked over at him in a kind of fascination for an instant, and replied, "It's two million seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars." He said it quite firmly, but he was aching for another drink.

Danforth was regarding him impassively, but his mental attitude toward him was much like that of a fastidious person toward a dirty rag on the din-

ner table. He thoroughly detested the thing which Hilton's speech connoted — a stinking thief!

"Why do you come to me with it?" he asked, coldly.

"Why, I know you better," Hilton replied. "You're near my own age. You can understand better."

That might imply that Danforth was nearer akin to the thief than Judge Crane was. As a matter of fact Danforth had no doubt that his father would forgive the trespass — at least, to the extent of wiping the slate, telling Hilton what he thought of him and letting it go at that. The judge played a large game, caring comparatively little for a couple of millions more or less. No doubt for the sake of the reputation of Pennell, Hilton & Company, whose senior partner was his brother-in-law, and for the sake of Hilton's wife, he would decline to prosecute. But in his cold repulsion and contempt, Danforth didn't care to tell Hilton that he could probably get off as easily as that, so he said rather forbiddingly:

"My father will have to decide what to do about it. You'll have to take it up with him."

Hilton resented that coldness and remarked, looking at the rug, "We all make our mistakes. . . . There was a mistake about that maid Katey."

Nothing was said for a moment and although Hilton's eyes were downcast he knew that Dan-

forth was looking hard at him. Then Danforth asked, evenly, "What do you know about that?"

"I know the girl disappeared from this house and was buried up by Stony Cove under an assumed name — with a bogus death certificate signed by Bradford McKeon," Hilton answered and looked up. He had turned somewhat pale. "I can prove it," he added.

For a further moment nothing was said, and Hilton spoke again, "We all make our mistakes. I made mine and have confessed it. If I have to pay why shouldn't other people?"

"Blackmail," said Danforth, as though casually naming an object which both of them recognized.

"Call it what you please," Hilton retorted, "The girl met her death in this house. Her body was smuggled out and buried under an assumed name, with a bogus death certificate. I can prove it. I can go to the coroner now."

Of course, Danforth had been thinking, and his thinking brought him around to this: "Well, go ahead and be damned so far's I'm concerned."

"You dare me to?" Hilton exclaimed.

"I say go ahead and be damned so far's I'm concerned," Danforth repeated coolly. "That's all I have to say." He stood up and took a step toward the door.

"I will go!" Hilton warned.

"Go and be damned," Danforth said once more and walked out.

After a moment Hilton followed him, and to the mental confusion which possessed him on entering the room rage was added. His mind seethed threats. He'd show them! He'd show them! . . . But how? If he did go to the coroner there could be no compromise between himself and Judge Crane. He might ruin them, but they would ruin him. . . .

He slipped down to the dining room and helped himself to another generous drink. As he put down the empty glass and turned, he saw his wife standing at the threshold of the room, regarding him mournfully. He felt it was part of the rotten luck that she should have stood there and seen him taking a big drink at ten minutes past twelve in the morning. Everything went against him! He had to walk toward her in order to leave the room and he felt resentful as though he had caught her spying on him. But she spoke quietly, "I want to talk to you, Lester; come up stairs."

He let her lead the way to her bed room, he following in resentful silence, and when they were inside she shut the door. When he sat down she drew her chair nearer to face him.

"I don't like to see you drinking at this time of day," she said, not contentiously or even reproachfully but just with a quiet regret.

"You don't like much that I do nowadays," he replied.

If her speech had, so to speak, laid a hand on

his shoulder, his reply simply shrugged the hand off. The drink had restored the color in his face. The handsome lineaments which she saw were the same as those of the vivid man, with an appealing air of undeserved ill-fortune gallantly borne, whom she had loved. The only difference was a few grey hairs at the temples and a mysterious coarsening of it all. Yet she saw a quite different man. She didn't wish to quarrel with him, or accuse him or reproach him, for she was beyond all that.

"We're married, you know," she reminded him. "You may regret it, but that doesn't change it. My name is yours. You ought to see that anything you do affects me. I don't want to quarrel with you. You know I've never quarrelled with you — not even when I cared awfully. You must know that whatever you do is my affair, too. Why can't we sit down sensibly and talk it over like two people in the same boat?"

She said it quietly enough, but it wounded him much more than a passionate outburst would have done. He knew that he no longer cared very much for her, but to know that she no longer cared very much for him cut his pride and sense of masculine proprietorship.

"What would you like to talk over?" he asked — with something of a well-bred insult in the manner of asking.

"Your affairs," she replied. "I've been thinking about it all the time. How could I help doing

that? Hidalgo Petroleum has been going lower all the time. You must be worst off than ever. I've been thinking about it all the time. Aren't they likely to find it out almost any time?"

He did not answer that. For all her quiet manner and conciliatory tone, she was catechising him — and that was intolerable from one's wife, who really knew nothing of business. As he merely stared at the window and kept silent, she went on:

"If Hidalgo goes still lower — or if it doesn't have a big rise — how do you expect to get out?"

"Jump out," he replied.

She waited a moment, to keep any touch of heat from her voice and pleaded quietly, "Talk to me sensibly. I'm not as stupid as you think. I'm not useless either. I can help to save the boat. . . . I don't see any chance of getting out, the way you're going now."

"What would you propose," he asked, with a faint but obvious sneer.

"I propose going to Judge Crane and Danforth today," she replied — still the quiet plea in her voice. "They're friendly to you. They like me. We will go together, if you wish. Or you go first and I will come after if it's necessary. I know them well. I suppose they're both bad men to tackle if you're on the other side of a business deal. But they're generous men, too. We'll tell them how it happened and ask them to call it a debt to be paid sometime — when you're able. I've been

thinking about it all the time. I know they'll do it. I'm sure of it. I'll go with you, or I'll go alone, if you wish. I'd go to Anne in a minute, and there's no question at all of her doing it, only you know how she is now; we shouldn't distress her. But the Judge and Danforth will do it. I'm sure they will. It's the way out, Lester." She was pleading more earnestly as she finished.

"I can see them doing it," he muttered — the interview with Danforth in his mind, and also mysteriously pushed on to contradict her. "It's two and three-quarters million dollars now," he added as though to daunt her.

"More than it was the other day," she replied. "You see, it gets worse instead of better. It can't go on that way. You must see that it can't." The growth of the embezzlement alarmed her afresh, as though it made disaster more imminent. "It will just go to smash if you let it run. I'm sure I'm right. Don't you see how much better off you'll be if you go to them now and make a clean breast of it than if you wait to be found out? Why, I should think just for the peace of your own mind you'd want to go to them even if you thought they wouldn't forgive you."

"Probably you wouldn't shed any tears over that," he retorted meanly — and feeling it was mean. "I don't know that I want their forgiveness. I may have something to forgive them. I may just say to them, 'Cancel it!'"

That seemed to her the merest vain flourish in the air. "I will go to them myself," she said.

"You keep your fingers out of it!" he commanded sharply.

"But my fingers are in it," she answered. "You must see that. I'm your wife. Why won't you talk to me sensibly? I know going to them is the right way. I know they'll do it. I promise you that they will."

"Promise me!" he exclaimed, derisively. "You've got it all fixed up then!"

"No," she said, "but I can fix it up. I know I can if it comes to that. You wouldn't be jealous of me anyway, and you've no cause to be. But I've known Danforth Crane a long time. I know he's fond of me — not in a way that need make any husband jealous; but he thinks a great deal of me. I think a great deal of him, and I'm proud of it. I'll go to Danforth if it's necessary. I'll go down on my knees to him. He'll not refuse me two and three quarters millions. I know it. I married you in good faith and I'm still your wife. I'll go down on my knees if it's necessary to save the boat. It means that much to me."

He didn't really doubt that she was telling the truth, and he no longer cared a great deal for her. All the same he was jealous. The picture of his wife on her knees to that burly male was gall to him; and he flung back at her:

"I've just been to your Danforth myself, and he told me to go to hell."

The statement took her breath and made her dark eyes round. After a moment she asked, incredulously, "Been to him? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," he retorted. "I've just been to him and told him I borrowed the judge's debentures and he told me to be damned." And fairly on the heels of that, he demanded, "What do you know about the way that girl Katey left this house? You could help me, I believe, if you really wanted to. What do you know about it?"

That brought up a new amazement — Katey coming up everywhere. Danforth had asked her about it. Now her husband was asking again. And what could Katey have to do with the affair? A fair picture of astonishment she asked, "What do you know about it? What has she to do with it?"

"You don't know?" he demanded, looking intently at her.

"I don't know anything," she replied. "What do you know?"

He had a feeling of triumph as, bending toward her and speaking low, he said, "Listen and I'll tell you what I know. The girl was killed here in this house. Her body was taken down to the laundry. It was seen there at five o'clock in the afternoon — two hours after the butler says she telephoned that she wasn't coming back. Ted Pennell's coat lay

over the body. It was taken away from here at night, in a closed car, to Dr. Bradford McKeon's. McKeon bought a coffin next day and issued a death certificate — giving an assumed name — and the girl was secretly buried in a cemetery up by Stony Cove. The body has been dug up and positively identified as Katey's. She'd been beaten and choked and her hair had been torn. That's what I know about it."

When she got her breath she murmured, "Impossible! It can't be true!"

"It's absolutely true!" he retorted. "I know it positively. I can prove it. All anybody needs to do is ask the coroner to exhume the body. And that's going to be done very soon unless your Cranes listen to reason. I'm not going down in the boat alone. You can bet your life on that."

She shook her head, "Oh, no — impossible. . . . Who could have done such a thing?"

"It's absolutely so!" he repeated. "And it doesn't take much guessing to tell who did it, either! Ted Pennell's coat lay over the girl. He'd been running around with her. He has mysteriously disappeared, too, remember. I know his father thinks he's still up here at Windham. He was a lot taken up with pretty Katey. He was after her, and got too enthusiastic about it and killed her. That's what happened. She'd been choked and beaten — her hair torn down. The body shows it." As he recited the savage details

a kind of savageness came up in his mind, as though he were dancing over a victim. "A fine little murder right here! Judge Crane covered it up for him — and put himself in a pretty bad boat by doing it. That's what happened!" He was sort of gloating over it — assured, triumphant. "I know all about it," he went on in that unwholesome triumph. "The judge and I will just wipe the slate and call it quits." He added a boast, "I'll put it up to him the first minute I catch him alone! We'll see who'll be damned!"

Her common sense combatted the amazing story he was telling her, but she was amazed also at his savage exultation, as though he had suddenly appeared in breech-clout and feathers, brandishing a tomahawk.

"Oh, you must be wrong," she urged. "It couldn't have happened."

"But it did!" he declared, with temper.

"But how do you know?" she asked.

"I know," he replied with further triumph, "because I've had good detectives working on it — the best in New York. They've traced out every detail. They know just where and when McKeon bought the coffin. They've traced out every detail, and clenched it absolutely. They've dug up the girl and identified her positively. That maid Katey is up in a little cemetery by Stony Cove this minute. There's no doubt at all about it. She was beaten and choked. Her body shows it." He

had been speaking rapidly, with ill subdued excitement. "It's so!" he concluded; then he looked over at her triumphant.

In breech-clout and feathers, flourishing a tomahawk! That was the way he seemed to her now — he who had appeared to be perhaps oversophisticated, suffering from too much civilization! The astonishment of that blent with the other astonishment over his story. She felt herself utterly at a loss. In the daze some mechanical impulse moved her to glance at her wrist watch and she said:

"It's luncheon time; we must go down."

A few minutes afterwards the family gathered around the table — Judge Crane and wife, Danforth, Mr. and Mrs. Hilton. All of them, excepting the gracious ailing woman at the head of the board, had strange matters in their minds; yet they kept up a light, casual talk so that, from all appearances, it might have been any family luncheon party with nothing whatever on its collective mind save the weather and the food and ordinary, amiable projects for passing the afternoon. The casual air was necessary lest the afflicted woman catch a note that would disturb her.

But she also, it transpired, had something on her mind. "Tilly's throwing me over — putting me off on poor Judy," she said to Edith Hilton, laughing, in the course of the luncheon. "Ditching me!"

"You must get out-of-doors," said the judge,

smiling. "I'd a lot rather drive you myself than spend a couple hours messing over things with Dan; but we've got something to talk about after luncheon."

Usually, in fine weather, the judge took his wife driving after luncheon. But this afternoon, it appeared, he had arranged that she and Judith Loughman should take the air in a car, for he had matters of business to talk over with his son. Danforth knew nothing about that arrangement until it transpired in the talk at luncheon and he wondered — with a glance at the man across the table — whether Hilton had already been to his father. He rather thought not; still it might have happened. At any rate Judge Crane was evidently getting his wife out of the way, and whatever was coming Danforth was ready for it. Now that Hilton had broken in, the game seemed firmly in his hands. He was thinking of sweet Peggy Loughman — and ready for whatever might be coming.

Hilton was wondering what effect this conference between father and son might have on his purposes. Had Dan, perhaps, told the judge? He had to wait and see — now and then, in a quick and stealthy glance, measuring the tall old man.

Judge Crane seemed in no hurry. After luncheon he lit his usual mild cigar. The three men, as though invisibly held together, strolled into the hall and stood about taking the cue from the judge who indulged in a little casual conversation from

time to time. His cigar was half smoked when his wife stepped out of the elevator, with coat and hat on, ready for her ride. The car was already waiting outside. The other two had tacitly understood that the judge was waiting for her to leave the house before taking up whatever he had on his mind. Hilton's taut nerves wound tighter. Was he going to be a party to the forthcoming conference?

Judge Crane waved his hand, smiling, to his wife in the car and turned from the door. His face settled into a grim and inscrutable mask, deeply carved around the mouth. "I want to see you, Dan," he said in his throaty tone. Without looking at Hilton, or appearing to be aware of his existence, he led the way up stairs.

So Hilton was not to be a party to the conference. Realizing that he felt a great relief. For one thing it put off the contest a little while. But for another thing, Judge Crane's prodigal household practised a homely abstemiousness in the matter of alcoholic beverages. Usually, at a family luncheon like the one of which they had just partaken, not even claret was served. That was a grievous loss to Lester Hilton's straining nerves. He went back to the dining room and treated himself to a cordial — a stiff pony of brandy — and then to another.

Meanwhile his wife had gone upstairs — trying to think out that amazing riddle. As to her hus-

band's conclusions touching Ted, she would not believe them. Yet he had been circumstantial — a coffin bought, a girl buried under an assumed name, the body exhumed and positively identified as Katey's. . . . Could the detective have misled him? Certainly it was odd that Katey didn't send for her clothes, and some letters — presumably from admirers — still came to the house for her. Had something strange happened?

She sat with her hands clasped, her head a little to one side, a slight line down her forehead, absorbed, striving with all her might to find an answer. She brought up carefully all that she had seen or heard of Katey, examining it for some clue. . . . A jealous admirer? But what would a jealous admirer be doing in the house? She thought on, holding herself rigourously to the task. If something had happened, there must be an answer. . . .

A whole hour passed. Her limbs were tired of that unchanging posture and she got up mechanically, hardly aware that she was doing it. She was striving to bring back all that she had noticed or heard on that Thursday when Katey had disappeared from the house. . . . She recalled how she had gone up there to Katey's room to get the maid's hat and cloak. Intently thinking she wandered out into the hall — the hall along which she had passed in going up to Katey's room that day. Abruptly a shutter moved in her brain, disclosing a picture.



XII

FATHER AND SON

JUDGE CRANE led the way into his study on the second floor, closing the door behind himself and his son, and when they were seated he surveyed the son for a moment, his own face settled in a grim mask, the corners of the mouth pulled down.

"Dan, you and I have gone along together a good while," he began, with deliberation. "I thought we were good friends."

"I hope we are, father," Danforth replied, with an inward wince.

"You don't act like it," the judge went on, without visible heat. "You've been to McKeon asking questions about that girl — the maid."

Danforth then understood what his father wished to talk to him about and answered, "Yes; I did go to McKeon."

The judge pressed deliberately on, in the manner of a professional cross-examiner: "You must have known it was my affair. You must have known that McKeon wouldn't have taken a hand in it except for me."

"Why, no; I didn't know that, father," said Danforth. "I went to McKeon to find that out."

"You suspected it, then."

"Well, it seemed probable that he had acted for you. I wanted to find that out," Danforth replied.

"If you even suspected that it was my affair, why didn't you come to me — if you had to go to anybody at all? I don't interfere in your affairs, do I?"

"No," Danforth admitted.

"Whatever happened," the judge went on, "happened in my house — with my doctor. I should say that, on the face of it it was my affair. But you didn't come to me. You went behind my back. That's why I am talking to you, Dan. It looks to me as though you were trying to get something on me. Naturally I want to know where I stand. If you're shooting at me from behind the hedge, what's up? What are you after? I thought I'd played fair with you — given you your share or a little better — let you have your head as much as you pleased and backed you the best I knew how. What's up?"

Stated in that way the son's action did look mean and the son couldn't deny that the statement was a fair one.

"Why, it was my affair, too," he said, and paused. . . . How to explain rationally the various steps by which he came into the affair? He deliberated over it a moment, then looked his father squarely in the face and cut through at a stroke to the heart of the matter:

"I love Peggy Loughman, father."

Such a confession might well be made by a son, fifteen years younger than this one, to a mother in one of those intimate moments which run back to the time when the son sat on the mother's knee. Passing between these two adult males, toughened by many a tussle with the world — the confessor being thirty-six and ponderous, with a name of power — it had a rather electrical effect.

"Of course, I've known her since she was a baby," Danforth went on. "She used to sit on my knee. . . . The little witch always got close to my heart. It didn't occur to either of us that it would ever be anything more than a big brother." He was looking steadily at the judge, but dreaming back to it. "About two years ago, when she was eighteen, it changed in a month. I wanted to marry her. I felt that she was too young then — it would hardly be decent. I think I could have married her if Ted Pennell hadn't come along. It seemed all up with me then. All the same she wouldn't let me sleep. . . ." Looking at the judge and dreaming back, Danforth gave a little sigh.

"Probably you've forgotten about it, father; or maybe you never felt it. When a man as old and hard as I am gets a hit that way, there's plenty of fuel to burn. It's true I'd never paid much attention to women. I've played around with some of 'em and been fond of some of 'em; but it never

counted for much more than amusement. She's got me all over. I've never begun to want anything else as much as I want her. I don't care a damn for Ted Pennell. He don't deserve one of her old shoes. If he's fool enough and puppy enough to queer his own game over a little doll of a housemaid and so throw Peggy away I'm entitled to that advantage. Let him get out. I'll be mighty good to Peggy if she marries me."

Judge Crane, in a very considerable astonishment, struck his fingers through his stubborn hair and muttered, "I hadn't thought of this."

"Well, naturally you wouldn't," Danforth replied. "I'm telling you because I want you to know it was my affair. You see, Peggy herself got anxious about that business of the missing maid. Some things came to her notice that disturbed her a lot. She came to me with her trouble. She does come to me, father. There's no reason why she shouldn't come to stay when this business is settled. I undertook to find out what had happened because she asked me to. I found out about a girl being buried on the strength of a death certificate issued by Dr. McKeon and I went to him."

Danforth knew well enough that this was not an exactly candid statement, yet who could point out just where it deviated from exact truth?

"It was my affair because Peggy herself asked me to find out. I thought it likely enough that

you were shielding Pennell on mamma's account. But when shielding him meant handing Peggy over to him and he had no right at all to her and I loved her myself, I thought I was justified in what I did."

More quickly than he had spoken before and frowning, the judge asked, "How much does she know about it, Dan? Peggy? What does she know about it?"

Danforth reflected a moment and replied, "She knows that Benjamin says Katey telephoned about three o'clock that she wasn't coming back and that she was seen lying insensible in the laundry about five o'clock, and next morning Dr. McKeon bought a coffin, saying it was for a maid in his house — although he never had a maid of the name he gave — and that he signed a death certificate for this fictitious maid of his and she was buried at Stony Cove that afternoon. She doesn't know positively that the girl who was buried up there is Katey, but she knows that it looks mightily that way. I could have told her positively that the girl was Katey, but she went away, you know — down to the Cotters."

Judge Crane's face puckered; he struck his hand through his hair again, and said with anxiety, "Dan, I'm afraid we've spilled the beans — both of us. I'm afraid something rotten has happened. . . . I like that Peggy girl mighty well myself. She's sort of my girl. When Ben Loughman

died I proposed to do just as well, according to the different circumstances, by his wife and little girl as he could have done himself if he'd lived. I liked Ben Loughman better than any man I ever met in my life. I liked Judy and the girl, too. You see, she's sort of been my girl. I warned her as well as I could about Ten Pennell. . . ."

The judge stared very gravely at his son a moment and lowered his voice a bit: "Ted killed that girl Katey in his bedroom — shot her."

There was no surprise in that statement to Danforth, yet hearing his father affirm it gave it finality. Having affirmed that, the judge took up his problem again, frowning over it.

"From start to finish, there's been just one thing in my mind about this business — one big thing that everything else has got to give way to — and that's my wife. You know mama ain't been very well lately, even for her. I know McKeon don't like the situation and I don't like it. . . . I've had a job to do ever since she cracked her heart lugging that damned box, son. You say I don't know how you feel about Peggy and probably I don't, for I'm a lot older than you are. But I know mighty well that if anybody on two legs lifts a finger against mama he's going to find a pretty lively old man on his back. She was what I thought of the first thing. Of course she loves Ted Pennell just like he was her own son. A great hullabaloo and racket — Ted taken up for murder

and all that — I believed that it would kill her and I believe so now. She ain't going to be killed in any such way if I can help it.

"All I thought about, really, was to keep it still and cover it up and save her. Of course, I've been pretty good to McKeon. Guess he knows I'll be better to him. I sent for him and put it up to him that he'd got to save his patient's life — got to! He knew I'd stand behind him to the limit, and it didn't look very difficult. Katey had no relatives in this country so far's we knew. Didn't seem that anybody would be inquiring particularly about a Polish maid or questioning anything Bradford McKeon did. He agreed to undertake it and got the girl buried, as you know, and there it stands."

"I thought it was about that," Danforth commented; "and as I look at it, Ted Pennell is counted out. He threw away his chances. I don't see that he's entitled to any consideration."

"He ain't," the judge replied; "not a bit. But I don't like the looks of it, Dan; not at all." In doubt and exasperation, the judge struck his hand across his hair again.

"You see, he wanted me to give him a job — send him away somewhere — a long way for a long time, he said. Naturally I wanted him to go a long way off for a long time myself. Ferguson is going to start for Russia next week, you know. I thought of that. It would be just about the job for him. But I wanted him out of the way meanwhile — not

having much more confidence in his good sense than in anything else about him. So I asked him if he knew some place where he could go and keep still until I sent him word and he mentioned a place down in New Jersey. That seemed all right temporarily, and he promised me, honor bright, that he'd stay right there and never take a step away until he heard from me.

"I made him promise, honor bright, and he did solemnly give me his word that he'd stay right there and do as I told him. He promised to start right away — this was just before lunch Saturday. I said he could tell mama that his father had telephoned for him. Well, he did leave right after lunch — with a solemn promise to stay right there until he heard from me, and then do exactly as I told him to. . . .

"But even after he'd gone, I was sort of worried about Peggy. Naturally I hadn't much confidence in him. I don't doubt he's in love with Peggy — in his way. And I don't doubt she's in love with him. With a girl in love you never can tell what fool thing may happen. So I gave Peggy a good broad warning — the best I could under the circumstances — and I thought, coming from me, she'd pay attention to it. I told her if she was my girl she shouldn't commit herself to Ted Pennell. You see, I was afraid he'd slip up here after her, or get her to come to him. I thought very likely if he got away where he couldn't see her, and

thought he was going off a good way — separated from her for a long time — he might begin to cry for his cake. So I gave her the best warning I could."

He was scowling, and loathe over the thought in his mind. "It wasn't until yesterday afternoon that I heard Peggy had left here. You know Judy. If she lost a leg somebody would have to remind her of it. She said Peggy'd gone down to see the Cotter girls, near Quincy — unconcerned as you please. Not having any confidence in Judy, either, I just came back here and called up the Cotters — not giving my own name, but asking for Peggy. The answer was that she hadn't been there. Then I called up Ted's place in New Jersey and the answer was that he'd left there — taken the train for New York. . . . So there that stands, Dan. I don't like the looks of it."

Danforth's face was impassive and he attempted no reply; but it struck him like a blow from a sledge hammer. In a moment he muttered, "I hadn't thought of that."

"No," said the judge. . . . "Well, what's anybody to do? I don't know. If you start a hullabaloo you're a mighty sight more apt to do harm than good. Peggy may have gone somewhere else than the Cotters'. Ted may have just run up to New York. But I don't like the looks of it. I've been on nettles ever since yesterday afternoon for fear a message might come that they were mar-

ried somewhere or other." He frowned harder over that a moment, and added, with exasperation, "But that don't seem like Peggy, either; don't seem as though she'd do that. Seems like she had too much sense — and character. Maybe she's just gone somewhere else. Maybe she's just let him persuade her to meet him somewhere and talk it over. But — a girl in love — it does make me damned nervous, he concluded, thrusting his fingers through his hair. "I'll feel a mighty sight better when I know there's nothing happened. . . . Of course, if she's run off and married him there's nothing to do but make the best of it."

It would be a poor best for Danforth — youth triumphant in the end, in spite of its enormous follies, and himself forever defeated. Probably it was only in this moment that he realized how mightily he had built on his hope of Peggy. He had to swallow, and his voice was husky as he said, "I suppose there's nothing to do but wait and see."

"Why, I don't see what else we can do, Dan," the judge replied. "If nothing has happened I wouldn't want to be the one to start any disturbance — about Peggy in that way. And if they're married, there's nothing more to be said. . . . At least, we can wait a day. Some word is bound to come soon, I should think." In a moment he looked up at his son, adding, "And so, you see, it may be up to us to keep the thing dark for Peggy's

sake, too. If she's married him, we don't want her dragged into this mess — publicly."

"That's true," Danforth assented, and with this new light on the affair he added, "But it's known already. Hilton knows about it."

"Hilton?" the judge exclaimed sharply. "How?"

"I don't know how," Danforth replied. "But I know he knows about it. He came to me with it this morning. Seems he's been stealing some of your Alpha Oil debentures. He proposes to use this Katey business to square the account — black-mail, of course. I think you best see him now; or we might see him together."

Being no putter-off Judge Crane immediately reached over and pushed a button on the table, at the same time asking Danforth, "What does he know?"

"Well, he knows about somebody being buried up there near Stony Cove on the strength of a death certificate signed by Dr. McKeon," Danforth replied. "Whether or not he knows positively that that girl up there is Katey, I don't know. I didn't cross examine him, but told him to see you. At any rate he seems to know enough so he might demand an official order to exhume the body and have it identified."

The judge pondered that for some time and remarked, "Guess I ain't as smart as I thought I was."

Benjamin appeared in the doorway and the judge said to him, "See if you can find Mr. Hilton and ask him to come up here right away."

The butler happened to know where Mr. Hilton was, or where he had been only a few minutes before, so he went there to find him and having found him delivered the message. Three or four minutes later Hilton knocked on the door of the judge's study, then at once opened the door and stepped in. There was a slight, disagreeable smile on his lips — in the nature of a swagger — and his face was flushed. He had hardly reached the table near which Judge Crane and Danforth sat before both of them perceived that he had been drinking recklessly — not exactly drunk, perhaps, by the common definition of that word, for he walked in a straight line; but certainly a long way from sober.

"You want to see me?" he asked smiling, with that little swagger in his tone, as he helped himself to a chair.

"Yes," the judge replied — himself very sober indeed. "Danforth tells me you've been to him with a story about a maid named Katey who left my house last week."

"Did he tell you the story, judge?" said Hilton, impudently.

"No; tell it to me now," the judge answered.

"Oh, very well," Hilton replied, the last drink that he had swallowed before coming up stairs reddening his mind. "Katey was killed here in

your house. Her body was carried down to the laundry and taken to Dr. Bradford McKeon's that night. Next day McKeon bought a coffin in Windham — Furness is the undertaker's name. He issued a death certificate and Katey was buried near Stony Cove. The body has been positively identified."

"How do you know?" the judge demanded.

Hilton looked over at him as one scoring the crucial point in a game and replied, "Cordwainer."

The name struck Danforth with a disagreeable surprise and his thought at once turned vengefully to Mr. Eastman. "Has Cordwainer been here?" he asked.

"No," Hilton replied, with assurance, "but one of his operatives named Miss Jenny George has been here. The body has been positively identified. And don't forget," he added warningly, "that it can be identified again — today, if necessary." In his alcoholic assurance he had determined to press the affair to settlement that day.

The judge pondered that for a moment and Hilton went on, confidently, "Not that I particularly want to stir up a mess, you know. I'm ready enough to let it rest. It's simply this: We all make our mistakes. I've made mine; you've made yours. I'm ready to wipe the slate and call it quits if you are."

"I don't much like being blackmailed," Judge Crane remarked after a moment.

"Well, judge," said Hilton, with impudent assurance, "you shouldn't put yourself in a position to be blackmailed, then — if you want to call it that. I've got a receipt in my pocket for two million, seven hundred and fifty thousand Alpha Oil debentures. Just sign that and I've nothing more to say."

"Cordwainer might have something more to say," the judge commented.

"You know Cordwainer as well as I do, or better," Hilton replied. "He has his reputation. I never heard him accused of blackmail. You know he couldn't afford it. His business is mostly in Wall Street. A quiet word spread around by you would queer him forever. You oughtn't to have anything to fear from him."

All of which was quite true, as Judge Crane acknowledged to himself.

"Besides," Hilton added significantly, "in a month or two there'll be nothing to dig up that anybody could recognize. The secret will bury itself for keeps in a few weeks. Nobody could raise a finger then — unless McKeon goes back on you, and I guess you've no fear of that."

That also was true enough. All the logic was in Hilton's favor; by the mathematical rules, he won the game. But Judge Crane couldn't let him win that way; something besides the logic wasn't in his favour. So the tall, rugged old man, looked over at the handsome, dapper young man — now

obviously rather drunk — and remarked, "I'm not losing any sleep over two million seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars these days, Hilton. If you'd come to me like a white man and confessed, I'd have let you off anyway. I'd have done it for your wife's sake and for the sake of the firm, if not for yours. I couldn't very well ruin my brother-in-law. If you hadn't been a crook yourself you'd have known that I play a different kind of game. I'd have let you off anyway."

Even through the alcoholic conflagration, that shot went home. For a moment Hilton knew it was true and that he had been a dog gratuitously. But the smoke of the conflagration prevented him from seeing clearly for more than a moment. "Well, what are you grumbling about, then?" he jeered. "If you're ready to wipe the slate, go ahead and do it and there's nothing more to be said. I'm satisfied if you are. Here's the receipt. Just sign it and the thing's all over with."

He took a blank envelope from his breast pocket and from it extracted a folded slip of paper, which he tossed across the table, repeating, "Just sign it and the thing's all over with."

Judge Crane unfolded the slip and at a glance saw it was a formal receipt to Pennell, Hilton & Company for two million, seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars of Alpha Oil debentures. "And what then?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" Hilton replied.

"I sign this receipt," said the judge. "That squares the debenture account. What do you expect me to do then? Do you expect me to go ahead doing business with you the same as before?"

That was a question that Hilton had wished to keep in the background. But since the judge ruthlessly dragged it out, he could only answer, "Why, you can do as you please about that. If you don't want to do business with me you don't have to." He was rather drunk, with all the optimism which usually accompanies that condition, yet this line of conversation made him uneasy.

"But you might want me to do business with you," Judge Crane persisted. "After blackmailing me into signing this receipt, you might decide to blackmail me again."

In his alcoholic optimism Hilton had, in fact, been looking beyond the mere signing of the receipt. That act would cancel the past and leave him nothing for the future. He had supposed that Judge Crane, in his anxiety to hush up the scandal, would let the future take care of himself — a timid man misjudging a bold one.

"If I sign this receipt," the judge asked, "I have no further hold on you, but you've still got a hold on me. I don't like it that way."

"You can take my word for it," Hilton suggested.

Just by way of coolly stating a fact which ought to be self-evident, Judge Crane replied, "Your word ain't worth a damn with me, Hilton."

Reddening more, Hilton flared back, "All right then! I'll go to the coroner — right now!"

Judge Crane coolly measured him for a moment. He would not have been afraid of Hilton sober, because going to the coroner meant ruin for Hilton, too. But it was not so easy to tell what an unstable, ill-balanced man who was already more than half drunk might do. He thought it rather likely that Hilton, if left to himself, would be completely drunk by dinner time.

"It needs some thinking over," he said reasonably. "I'm ready enough to sign the receipt but I want to know where I stand. When I'm dealing with a gentleman who tells me he's stolen two million, seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars I ought to be entitled to say whether I'll take the wallop in the neck or in the belly. You spoke of Cordwainer. I don't remember the woman's name. What is it?"

"Her name is Jenny George," said Hilton with his truculent air, not catching the relevance of the question.

"Make a note of that, Dan," said the judge to his son. Then to Hilton, "She must know the story, too. Not much use my paying you a couple of million dollars for it if she may bob up tomorrow and demand a million from me. I want to know where I stand in that regard. You say she's working for Cordwainer, but I'd like some corroborative evidence of it. I know Cordwainer and have some

confidence in him. If he says this woman is working for him and he'll vouch for her, that's one thing. I want to call him up and hear what he has to say on that point. That's reasonable enough, ain't it?"

It was so reasonable that Hilton could only retort, "Go ahead, call him up!"

"It will take a little time," the judge reminded him; "maybe an hour or two on Saturday afternoon when he's apt to be away from the office. Then I want to know what security I can take from you so's to be reasonably sure that when I sign the receipt that will end it. A little time will do your case no hurt. I'm ready enough to sign your receipt, Hilton; but I want to know where I stand. I'll call up Cordwainer and talk it over with Dan, and then I'll send for you or come and find you. You can make yourself comfortable around the house somewhere."

As it was the master of the house who was speaking Hilton knew not how to refuse that request to leave the room for the present. Scowling, he muttered, "Very well; if that suits you better. I will be waiting for you," and so took himself from the room.

He was angry about it, with an exasperated feeling that, whereas he had meant to dictate, these insolent Cranes had somehow taken the direction of the affair out of his hands and were coolly shunting him off to one side while they deliberated. He hadn't meant that there should be anything left

for them to deliberate upon. And the moment he was out of their masterful presence, he reacted to the rebuff by flaming up defiantly. He resolved that he would give them just one hour and then bring them to book. Just one hour! He drew out his watch and marked the time, frowning fiercely. Just one hour! So hotly resolving, he made his way to the sideboard in the dining room.

Meanwhile, as soon as the door closed on Hilton, Judge Crane took up the affair with his son, asking, "How did you come to know about this, Dan—the burial up there at Stony Cove and so on?"

It was naturally a rather embarrassing question. "As I told you, father," he replied, "I acted for Peggy. She'd heard something about the disappearance of this maid, Katey. It seems a relative of the furnace-man named Sam Thorp peeked, somehow and saw her lying in the laundry. He thought she'd been drinking or had been drugged. Peggy came to me with her trouble. My idea was that Ted had taken the girl somewhere. Peggy proposed to find out what had become of her. She came to me—asked me to help her. I told her she'd best let it alone, but as she insisted, I telephoned to Cordwainer."

"Cordwainer!" the judge repeated, with surprise. "Not this same woman—what's her name?"

"No," Danforth replied. "Cordwainer sent me

a man on whom he said I could depend." He smiled a little, grimly, adding, "Seems Hilton must have gone to Cordwainer and Cordwainer sent him a woman — all fish for Cordwainer's net."

"I see," the judge commented. "Well, I have considerable faith in Cordwainer. He can't afford to blackmail. . . . This man of yours—is he around here now?"

"Yes," Danforth replied.

The judge pondered it, rubbing his chin, and observed, "It's a situation where we've got to trust somebody and I suppose we may as well take a chance on Cordwainer's man as on anybody else. . . . You see, I wasn't as smart as I thought I was, Dan. You know and Hilton knows and these two Cordwainer people know and Lord knows how many besides. It's getting out. . . . It's getting out. . . ."

He pondered it a moment more, and went on in a somewhat lower key, looking over at his son: "It won't do, Dan. We're getting in too deep water. You see, as Hilton said, the whole thing hinges on that body up at Stony Cove. If anybody gets that, we're busted. I'm going to have that body removed. I want it done tonight. They can tow it out to sea and sink it."

That suggestion struck Danforth disagreeably; but he made no comment.

"The body's got to be put out of the way," Judge Crane repeated. "It's too dangerous now. I've

found out that when danger stares you in the face the best tactics is to hit it on the nose. There's no trusting that fool Hilton. He's drunk now and he's apt to be drunk again tomorrow. Even if he meant to keep his mouth shut there's no telling when he might blab. I've got to protect my wife. I've got to protect Bradford McKeon. I've got to protect myself, too." With a faint grin he added, "I'm pretty good at that."

He frowned over it a moment and went on with some exasperation, "You see, I found myself in a devil of a hole all of a sudden — with the body of a girl dumped on my hands. As I told you before, the first thing I thought of was my wife. I was going to save her from it or know why. When I thought it over, getting her buried in that way seemed pretty simple and it seemed that that ought to end it. Of course, I was sorry for the girl, but she was dead anyhow. It seemed pretty simple. If I had known what was going to happen I'd have taken other steps. But I didn't know. I got into it and I got McKeon into it, and now that this other business has come up I'm going on through with it. The only way I see now is to get the body out of sight — sink it at sea, I should say. It can be managed."

Danforth completely understood his father's justification, and sympathized with it. Having gotten into it, he himself would go on through without quailing.

"We've got to trust somebody," the judge continued, thinking it over and meaning that he and Danforth could hardly manage it themselves. "We may as well take a chance on your Cordwainer man. Can you get hold of him now? I want to do it tonight. He struck you as a man to be trusted, did he?"

"Yes — fairly," Danforth replied. "I'd as leave take a chance on him as on anybody else. We can pay him so well that he can afford to forget it."

"Well, let's get hold of him and see what he has to say," said the judge.

But the Cordwainer man had already suggested to Danforth that the body might be removed and he had vetoed that suggestion for a cogent reason. He still had the same reason for opposing it.

"You'd be protecting somebody else, too, father," he suggested. "I mean Ted Pennell. He has no right to protection."

"Well, no — so far as he alone is concerned," the judge assented.

"He's putting himself out of the game," Danforth went on. "I have a right to see that he keeps out."

"Maybe you have, son," said the judge; "but he's all tied up with these other people. I don't know how I can protect them without protecting him, too." A somewhat harsher energy showed in his voice and for a moment he avoided looking at

his son — feeling that a contest was rising between them.

Danforth also for the moment avoided looking at his father, but he said, conclusively, "He's got to keep out of it. The body's my hold on him. I don't want it moved tonight."

So the issue was joined between them.

"But maybe he's got her already, Dan," the judge reminded him. "I'm afraid it's too late already."

Danforth drew a thick hand over his forehead and replied, more slowly than usual, "Well, if it's too late, it's too late. If she's married him, that settles it. I'll stand by her the best I know how and be her friend, as I've been her friend all my life." In saying it his voice trailed down to a lower key. "If I've got to swallow that medicine, I'll swallow it and make no faces in public." A little sigh escaped him, for Peggy's image was in his mind.

"But it may not be too late. They may not be married. If they're not, I don't propose that they shall be. He has no right to her. . . . She was in love with him. I suppose he thinks he's in love with her. He has youth in his favour, father. He has selfishness in his favour, too. If he comes back here now and there's no evidence against him and he tells her a good lie and looks woebegone and whistles the tune, she may go to him. Peggy's only a girl yet. That's not going to happen. I

can have her now; I feel sure of it. It's only by one chance in a hundred — and his idiocy — that I could have had her. The one chance has come to me. It sha'n't get out of my hands. I'll fight like all hell for it. I think I have a right to, father."

He was pleading his case with earnestness and emotion, although his heavy voice was controlled; but whatever was formidable in him came out as he spoke, and his father recognized it with a disquieting sort of shock — so to speak, beholding his own cub whom he had brought up and taught to fight standing squared across his path. He pulled his tough dewlap between thumb and forefinger. Very few things in life could be less welcome to him than a fight with his son; so he spoke in a mild, reasonable tone:

"Well, I'm bound to protect these other people — say nothing of myself."

So there was the issue indubitably joined between them.

"I'm afraid of him, father," said Danforth. "If the actual evidence is gone he'll lie about it. Of course he's lied to her about it already more than once. She's only a girl and romantic. He'll think up some plausible fable and bluff it out with her. It's one chance in a million for me. I may be foolish — at my age — but I can't help it. Say I'm mad about her, if you like. I am mad about her."

His father looked him in the eye and inquired, "Mad enough to throw me down, Dan?"

It was a hard question, but Danforth likewise looking his father in the eye, replied at once, "If it had to come to that I'd be mad enough for it. But there's no need. You can afford to take the chance of letting it rest a day or two. It must."

There was no doubt about the conclusiveness of that, and Judge Crane replied grimly, "In that case there's nothing more to be said." Not that he gave up his own plan, however; already he was prepared to consider what steps he might take independently of his son.

Danforth stood up, saying, simply, "Sorry; but I can't see it any other way." He knew well enough that his father was not likely to give up easily, so he added gravely, "Please don't start anything tonight; it would be foolish." With that quiet and final challenge he moved toward the door.



XIII

"I NEED A LITTLE TIME"

WITH a certain sense of strangeness Judge Crane watched his son's burly figure move toward the study door. They were antagonists; a covert declaration of war had just passed between them. Who could have imagined that such a thing would happen?

Then the judge witnessed an odd little pantomime. Danforth opened the door and stepped into the hall, but halted, the door-knob still in his hand, and so stood for a moment; then he stepped back into the study, pulling the door after him but leaving a crack so that he could still look down the hall. For a minute, he stood that way, and then went into the hall, briskly, closing the study door behind him. Of course the little pantomime struck Judge Crane as odd.

Opening the study door, his mind sombrely full of this clash with his father, Danforth's eyes had travelled mechanically down the hall and at once lighted upon an arresting object — namely, a new and distinguished travelling bag. It was of pale yellow leather, with stout straps over the top and metal fixtures of dull wrought iron — an. uncom-

mon sort of bag. A fortnight before Ted Pennell had exhibited exactly such a bag to him in the new pride of ownership.

The bag stood on the hall floor near the wall — not, however, near the door to Ted Pennell's bedroom, but on the opposite side of the hall and some distance this way from Ted's room. But it was close to the door of Edith Hilton's bedroom. So much Danforth took in at a glance and halted in his tracks. The next moment he saw the door of Edith's room opening. A man, clad in light-coloured summer flannels, stepped partly out and turned, as though to take another look backward into the bedroom. The man looked rather like Ted Pennell and Danforth withdrew into the judge's study, keeping a crack to peer through.

When the man came wholly into the hall, Danforth saw that it was Ted. Having put a key into the lock, Ted locked the door, tried the knob to make sure that it was fast, then, with the key in his hand, picked up his bag and went on across the hall to his own room, which he entered.

Of course, Danforth wondered, and his wonderings were of a dark tone. He went down the hall and listened at Edith's door, but all seemed still within. He had seen the door locked a moment before and so didn't bother to try it. But the bedrooms there, on both sides of the hall, were constructed in suites of two, with a dressing-room and bathroom between, so that a man and wife might

have each a separate bedroom but the use of the same dressing-room and bath. Danforth stepped on to the door opposite Ted's — the door of the bedroom which, just now, was assigned to Lester Hilton.

When he tried the door it yielded to his touch and he entered. There seemed nothing uncommon in the aspect of the bedroom. He crossed it, listened at the door of the dressing-room, tapped very gently upon it, and got no response. He entered the dressing-room, found it empty and crossed to the door to Edith's bedroom. . . . It might be embarrassing; but when he had listened a moment and heard no sound, he gently tried the knob, found that it yielded and pushed the door open a bit, peering in. An instant later he was crossing the room to the bed on the further side.

Edith Hilton lay on the bed, a folded towel partly concealing her face, and what of it he could see was white as the pillow. But when he had nearly reached the bed she heard him and lifted her head, with a wild look. In that action the folded towel, which had been wrung out in water, fell from her face.

There was a bruise on her left cheek where she had been struck savagely; blood still oozed a little from it. Her right eye was swelling and turning black from another blow. Her hair was disheveled, but that might have been from the towel and pillow. On either side of her white throat were

long, purpling marks where undoubtedly she had been choked hard. As Danforth saw her another face arose upon his mind — a sweet face, too, with soft, disordered hair above it, bruised by savage blows, the brute marks of fingers on the white neck.

As Edith raised herself, with that wild look, a shudder ran through her body; then she recognized Danforth. Her hurt face puckered and she gave a weak, plaintive cry:

"Dan? Why did you come in? Go away, Dan. I can't talk now. . . . I'm too hurt. Go away. I'll talk by and by."

The weak, plaintive voice wrung his heart in pure sympathy.

"What's happened to you, Edith?" he asked.

She stared blankly at him an instant, as though he should have known what had happened; then dropped back on the pillow and moaned, "I fell and hurt myself. Go away, Dan — please. I can't talk."

He felt it would be mere brutality to stay after that, and apparently she was not in a condition of any danger. So he withdrew by the way he had come, through the dressing-room to the bedroom now assigned to her husband. There he sat down on the arm of a chair for a minute or two, trying to think, although the stuff that was in his mind didn't yield itself to thinking very well. Leaving the bedroom, then, he crossed the hall and entered Ted's room without bothering to knock. No man

who could have seen his mind would have cared to stand in his way.

But Ted's room was empty. The distinguished travelling bag stood on the floor where its owner had dropped it. A light-coloured flannel coat lay in a heap on a chair where it had evidently been tossed. It was the coat Ted had been wearing when Danforth saw him in the hall five minutes before. Danforth picked it up. A sleeve and shoulder were dabbled with blood.

But its owner couldn't be far away. With that idea Danforth started down the stairs. The hall down there was empty. He walked over to the living-room door, glanced in, and all the arrows in the hunter's quiver struck him at once.

Ted Pennell, in light trousers and a darker coat, which he had evidently put on in a hurry after discarding the blood-stained garment, sat in a big arm chair, humped over, his elbows on his knees, his head bowed. And Peggy was sitting on the arm of the chair, her arm resting lightly over his bowed shoulders, comforting him.

Naturally Peggy saw Danforth first and at once got up from the arm of the chair, advancing to meet him — a slim figure in a brown travelling suit with a little three-cornered brown straw hat on its shiny head. The sweet image of her which haunted Danforth's mind would have had subtly to take on some age and care in order to correspond exactly with this advancing figure, as though in the few



days since he had seen her she had some way left off being a girl and become a woman. She was smiling at him, holding out her hand—not the bubbling smile, like a burst of bird song, for there was some age and care in it; but it was not less sweet for that.

“Hello, Dan,” she said in a quiet tone.

As his hand closed over hers all that was most dear and fragrant in the old image seemed there; he thought it impossible that what he had feared could have happened.

“Hello, Peggy,” he rumbled, noticing that she didn’t offer to kiss him this time as she usually did when they met after an absence, but there was no other sign of reserve or withdrawal from him. It seemed to him that the omission was not because he had fallen to a lower place in her regard but because she was occupied with weightier things and forgot it. But he didn’t wish weightier things than himself to occupy her mind.

She murmured to him, in a half whisper, “I don’t know what’s the matter with Ted. . . . Upset; nervous, I suppose.”

Ted was looking at them then and Danforth observed that the young man’s eyes were somewhat dim as though he had been shedding tears. Apparently he had come down from Edith Hilton’s room to Peggy to blubber and be comforted!

For once Peggy was tremendously in the way and Danforth could say very little. Something

was choking him and bursting his throat; he knew that his hands were trembling slightly. There was something that he yearned, unspeakably, to settle immediately. Peggy was in the way, and now that she had come up to him and he had one full look at her he took care to keep his eyes averted from her.

"My father is up in his study," he said; "we'll go up there."

And Ted immediately sprang up, saying, "That's exactly what I want!"

Danforth ignored that impudence and silently led the way up the stairs. Peggy moved beside him and he was acutely aware of her as though the perfume of her hair filled his nostrils. . . . Had anything happened?

But in one way it was immaterial whether anything had happened or not. A little while before he had said to his father that if Ted and Peggy were married he would help shield her from knowledge of the grave at Stony Cove. But that was before he had seen Edith Hilton. Now his feelings were quite different. Married or not, it should all come out. Marriages could be set aside. So resolved, he opened the door to his father's den.

Turning in his chair, the judge saw them enter. One of them, for the moment, was his enemy against whom he had been plotting as he sat in there alone. At sight of the other two a furrow appeared in his brow, for the first thought was that the thing which

he feared in respect of them had happened. He gave them not even a nod, therefore, but sat still, frowning, the stubborn hair thrusting up over his forehead, his brown face deeply carved, like a grim old chief sitting in judgment. It was Danforth who placed a chair for Peggy and it was Ted who spoke first, looking the judge hardily in the eye.

"Judge, Peggy tells me something or other happened here about that girl Katey. She says somebody saw Katey lying insensible in the laundry after she was supposed to have left the house for good, and next day a girl was buried up by Stony Cove on the strength of a death certificate signed by Dr. McKeon and the next day I disappeared without saying anything to anybody, and it might look as though I had a hand in Katey's disappearance and you'd covered it up for me and I'd skipped out. When she told me that I proposed to go straight to the police, or sheriff, or coroner, or whoever would be the right man, and come here afterwards. But Peggy thought I ought to come here first. So I'm here and I want to have it out with you now."

His tone was not exactly defiant, although it sounded bluntly uncompromising. But Judge Crane had heard many a man bluff and was not particularly impressed.

"You gave me your word that you'd stay down there in New Jersey until I sent for you. Why didn't you do it?"

It obviously confused Ted a bit, for to answer he had to blame the woman. So he said, "When I heard Peggy was in New York I wanted to see her."

As though seeking the truth where the truth might be found, Judge Crane turned to her saying, kindlier, "Tell me what's happened since you left here, Peggy — and why you left." He wanted to know that first — for unlike his son, he had not said "Married or not!"

"Ted wrote me a letter," she replied simply. "I read it a good many times. . . . I've known Ted a long time. When I read it over, Judge, it seemed to me it wasn't possible that he could have done anything like that — what those circumstances pointed to. I felt it must be all wrong some way; there must be some explanation. I got a letter from a girl in the same mail — you know Nell Wheaton. She complained about having to stay in New York until the first of the month." She hesitated a moment, in a little confusion. "You see, I'd had a letter the day before from Alice Cotter asking me if I couldn't come down there for a few days. I really don't know why I told mother I was going to the Cotters' instead of to Nell Wheaton. . . . But it's no use explaining things to mother, ever. She might think it odd that I'd go to the city this weather and I didn't want her to ask any questions. I just said I was going to the Cotters'; but I went on to New

York and telephoned Ted over in New Jersey. He came to see me and I told him. He insisted on coming back here at once. I thought he ought to, too. I met him at the station in New York at half past six this morning. We took the earliest train."

"You saw him at Nell Wheaton's last evening," the judge suggested.

"Yesterday afternoon," she corrected. "He had to go back to New Jersey to pack up his things."

So evidently what he had feared had not happened. They weren't married. With a grim satisfaction, Judge Crane prepared for the alternate course of action.

"He says you sent him down there, Judge," Peggy added. It was not exactly an accusation, but it required an explanation.

"I sent him down there because he asked me to," said the judge grimly.

"Well, that's true enough," Ted admitted. "I wanted to get away. . . . Peggy was sore at me. I was awfully dissatisfied. I wanted to go away somewhere for awhile." The young man took an instant to get his story firmly in hand, and resumed resolutely, "I told Peggy and I'll tell you that there's one point in this thing I can't explain now. I said to her the day I left here that I didn't see Katey at all the day she disappeared. And Peggy says I did see her and had her in my car with her. I don't dispute her. We'll just have to let that stand as it is. You can say I lied about it

if you want to. But aside from that one point the rest of this Katey business is all nonsense. Katey's no more killed than I am. I'll bet my head she's in tip-top health right now and I could find her in a few hours if I wanted to."

"Where?" the judge demanded.

But Ted avoided that question, saying, "It seems there was a girl buried up at Stony Cove and somebody thinks it's Katey. The way to settle that is to look at the girl. It can be arranged through the police or the sheriff or somebody. I remember a case only a few weeks ago, probably you read it in the newspapers, where a man was dug up to identify him. That girl up there is no more Katey than I am. If you have any doubt about it, the quickest way to settle it is to get the sheriff. I'll go to him right now if you say so."

That impudence was hard to bear. Grimly and with a strong sense of justice the judge struck back:

"That girl up at Stony Cove is Katey. She was killed in this house — in your bedroom with your revolver. You killed her yourself and tried to hide the body."

For a moment Ted only gaped at him and then muttered, "You're crazy."

"I'm not crazy," said the judge. "I've had some experience with courts and juries. You talk about betting your head. I'll bet my head I can convict you on the evidence I've got now. Katey is dead.

I've seen her dead body with my own eyes. She was killed in your bedroom with your revolver. I know it as well as I know that I'm sitting here."

Ted was still gaping, as these asseverations sunk into his mind, and he declared in a way that sounded fairly foolish even to himself, "Judge, I don't know any more about it than the man in the moon."

With that he ran his fingers through his hair and in the dead silence stared from Judge Crane to Danforth and from Danforth to pale, starry-eyed, trembling Peggy. Then he leapt from his chair and seized the telephone on the table.

They heard him exclaim to the operator, "Give me the sheriff's office. I don't know the number, but I want the sheriff's office, quick!"

But at that Judge Crane sprang up, his face in a deep scowl, putting forth a menacing hand, and cried, "Wait!" He took a step nearer, leaned over and put the outreached hand on the telephone which Ted was holding. "Give me that telephone!" he commanded. Ted still held the instrument and Danforth stood up significantly. Peggy's lips parted but no sound came; her hands clasped in her lap. A struggle seemed imminent. Ted then released the instrument. A moment later Judge Crane spoke into it;

"What number is this? . . . That's the wrong number. Central made a mistake." He put the telephone back on the table — his side of the table,

however,—and resumed his seat; but it was evident that his temper was still agitated by the clash that had occurred. There was a rough and aggressive edge in his voice as he said:

"If you were the only person concerned, I'd be as ready to call the sheriff as you are. But you're not the only person. I've taken some steps in this business myself. I did it to protect my wife. She can't stand such a shock as that. She ain't going to have to stand it. I helped cover this thing up for her sake. It's going to stay covered for her sake."

The ailing woman came into Ted's mind then and daunted him, for he too felt that she should not have to bear such a shock. But he cried to the judge:

"You tie my hands and strike me in the face! You accuse me of murder and won't let me go to the sheriff. I had no more to do with Katey's disappearance than the man in the moon!" Angrily, he blurted, "I don't believe she's dead!"

Judge Crane, so to speak, was resuming his judicial robe. Grimly, he replied, "Let's see now if we can't try this case just among ourselves. Suppose you sit down."

Ted obeyed him; they had the feeling of a court solemnly convening.

"To begin with," said the judge, "Katey is dead. I saw her dead body myself. She was killed in your bedroom—or, rather, in the dressing-room

off your bedroom. She had been shot through the heart with your revolver. The revolver was beside her. That's absolutely sure—beyond any question." He spoke with an aggressive deliberateness, driving the words in, his eyes holding Ted's.

"She had been attacked before she was shot—beaten and choked, her hair torn down. The marks were on her face and on her throat where she'd been struck and choked."

Ted gave a gasp—"Oh!"—and a look of comprehension swiftly dawned in his eyes. "Beaten and choked?" he cried.

"Beaten and choked," the judge repeated.

Excitement shone in Ted's face. He sprang up crying, "Good Lord! I know then—I know!"

But he did not finish the sentence. Instead he started pacing eccentrically across the room, his lips working together, "Good Lord! I know!" he exclaimed again; but again he did not finish the sentence. Instead, having reached the other wall, he turned excitedly and paced back.

Judge Crane, Danforth and Peggy waited tensely for a further disclosure. But Ted seemed to have no further disclosure to make. He ceased his eccentric pacing after a moment and gave himself up to thought, compressing his lips hard. Then he turned to the judge like a man saying a final word:

"Judge, we'll just have to let it rest for the

present. It will all come out. It's bound to, but just now I can't say anything more. For the present we'll just have to let it rest."

And as soon as he had spoken he was aware that this was a lame enough conclusion — after his fine heroics to Peggy to the effect that he would return at once to Overlook and clear the whole matter up in half an hour, and after his other heroics of seizing the telephone and demanding an immediate investigation. A very lame conclusion; he felt that the moment after he had spoken.

Looking at Judge Crane he read in the old man's face stony disbelief. Looking at Danforth he read something still more damning. They already convicted him, and for the moment he could say no more; there was another face in his memory which forbade it. But in a way Judge Crane and Danforth hardly mattered. The true and final court lay elsewhere. In a deep agitation he turned to it — taking three steps across the room and falling on his knees beside Peggy's chair.

He put his arms around her waist and gave his case to her, with a cry: "Peggy! My God! You don't think I killed poor Katey! You can't think that of me! You don't, do you?"

Her hands not moving in her lap she bent her head to kiss his forehead and replied, low and grave, "No, Ted. I can't think that, but you see it must be explained."

"Of course, it must be explained," he replied.

"It will be explained. I know — but you'll give me a little time?"

"Yes," she said.

Then he stood up, looking at the judge and Danforth as though he had somehow been quite vindicated as he said, "That's all, then. I need a little time. But if you want me I'll be right around here." With that he walked out of the room.

Which was bitter to Danforth Crane beyond anything he had imagined. Peggy had heard his father bluntly accuse Ted of murder. She had heard Ted's poor bluff that he knew Katey was alive and had seen it collapse. She had seen this last comedy of declaring, "I know —" and then stopping short. And after all, at the end, he had held her in his arms and she had said she believed him.

Nothing whatever would serve, it seemed. Although she herself saw him pull the trigger, yet when he whistled she would go to him; he knew the tune. That was bitterer to Danforth than anything he had imagined. Yet after all, she didn't really know. She didn't really understand; she was only a girl — she must know the whole truth for her own sake.

Peggy sat still a moment after Ted had left the room, musing. Then she raised her eyes to Danforth's face and said, low and sweet, as an audible continuation of the musing, "It's impossible he could have done it, Dan." With that she got up,

to leave the room also, and some way as she arose a yet keener sense of her grace penetrated Danforth. For just an instant he found his throat too dry and tight for speech. Then, rising, he said, "Wait, Peg," and stepped towards her.

She waited dutifully, and felt the emotional stir in him before he spoke, huskily:

"You know my father and I love you very much."

That struck true on her heart and she replied, "Why, of course, Dan! And I love you—both of you!"

A fond sense of what he had been to her all her life—a sure rock of refuge whether her trouble was a broken doll or a murdered maid—moved her, and she put her hands on his thick arms, looking up at him, saying, "Good old Dan!"

"I want you to sit down and listen a minute," he said, in that oddly thickened voice.

She obeyed that, too. He lifted a chair over to sit close by her, taking her hand and holding her eyes with his.

"You know, Peggy, there's now and then a man with a bad spot in his brain. I knew a man like that myself. I thought he was a very good sort—as good a man, say, and as normal as I myself. Then presently I found out what he's been doing in secret. It's a rotten subject, dear girl—but it seems necessary to tell you. A man of that kind, no doubt, ought to be pitied and put in a hospital

for treatment. But you never can tell what they'll do. Probably they can't tell themselves. As long as they're at large, they've got to be looked out for. Sometimes they do fearful things to women.

"You've heard my father say Ted killed Katey. He knows. We'll have to let that be for the present. But I know something else, Peggy; something else quite as bad as that. If any harm came to you I wouldn't know what to do, so until this business is cleared up I want you to promise me — promise me solemnly — that you won't go anywhere alone with Ted. He can't be trusted. For today, at any rate, you must promise."

She then comprehended, with slow incredulity, what he had meant by a man with a rotten spot in his brain. He had meant that Ted was such a man and could not be trusted. He had said he knew something besides the affair of Katey. She knew there were men like that.

She bent her head and drooped forwards in the chair, making a little exclamation: "Oh, Dan! — Oh, Dan!" — breathless and pulseless as though he had been beating the life out of her with his big fists until she could just gasp; but she clung tight to his hand.

"God knows I'm sorry to hurt you," he said, "but I'm horribly afraid, Peggy. You'll know why later. I'm horribly afraid. Give me the promise."

Her head bent and clinging to his hand, she

struggled a moment and then murmured, "I promise." That was like condemning Ted, too; but at the moment she knew not what else to do. Having promised she got up quickly and glided from the room, with a feeling that the sky had fallen on her.

When the door closed behind her, Danforth drew a heavy hand across his brow and shut himself up for a long moment. Turning to his father, then, he gave the explanation:

"This case puzzled me more or less up today, father. I was satisfied the girl was killed in a scuffle. I could imagine easily enough how they might have come to be scuffling. But the choking and beating — usually white men, our breed of white men, don't do that; at least not when they're sober. That puzzled me.

"You saw in here how his mind acted; first declaring he knew Katey was all right and he could find her in an hour and then as good as saying he knew who killed her but couldn't tell. Then his sudden bluff of calling the sheriff. If you look the case over, father, you'll probably see that his is a poor article of mind — cunning, in a way; but a poor article. I understand it now."

He observed the judge a moment and added, lower, "The fellow's a degenerate. He was choking and beating Edith Hilton in her room half an hour ago."

"My God!" the judge gasped.

"A fact, father," Danforth went on. "That happens once in a while, you know — good family and all that don't seem to be a protection. I knew a case myself. We've got that sort of a chap on our hands. So you understand why I made Peggy promise not to go away with him."

"I should say so!" exclaimed the judge.

"I suppose he ought to be shut up in an asylum," Danforth remarked; "but I suppose that couldn't be done without a trial on this Katey case and a conviction."

"No," said the judge.

"You see, he's got us tied," Danforth went on. "We can't strike him on the Katey case. Probably we can't take up the case of Edith — you know how women usually feel about talking of such an affair. He's got us tied. If he's a mind to just sit and bluff it out, I don't know what we could do."

"Well, I don't," the judge confessed. "Of course, I didn't suppose we were dealing with a lunatic — a moral lunatic anyway. If he's a mind to just sit still and bluff it out, I don't know what we can do."

Danforth pondered in silence a moment and then seemed to continue the pondering aloud as he looked blankly at the wall. "I don't know how another man might feel about it; but all I feel is just something to set my heel on — like a mad dog.

I wouldn't give him much more consideration than that."

He looked over at his father. "I saw Katey — choked and beaten and dead. I saw Edith choked and beaten — the marks on her throat" — He lowered his voice and it shook slightly, but his abrupt speech was like the charge of a bull; "Peggy's not going to make a third to them — that shall never happen — if I have to strangle him with my own hands."

Judge Crane looked hastily away from his son's face; also he got up in an agitation of his own and began pacing.

"Dan, be careful," he said earnestly. "I'm an old man — a pretty tough old man, too; but not as tough as I used to be. I know there are limits. You've got to draw the line somewhere. This business of Katey, now — I did it for my wife and I'd do it again; but it really troubles me a lot. As a man gets older he don't want messes of that kind on his mind."

He stopped his pacing a moment, thoughtfully. "I've had an idea about this Katey business, too. It seemed safe enough, at the time. But we did go and stick the poor little maid under ground without her day in court — no chance to tell her little story and ask for justice. I've had an idea about that — sort of looks like she was getting back at us, you see; and I wouldn't be the one to say

she hadn't a right to. I'm a pretty tough old man; but you've got to draw the line somewhere. There are things a white man mustn't do."

He moved toward his son and looked down at him. "Killing a man's one of them, Dan. I know you, son; probably I'm built more or less that reckless way myself. But I tell you, some things won't do. You've got to draw the line."

Danforth at once replied rationally, "No doubt you're right, father. You must certainly draw the line somewhere. No doubt you're right." But that reasonableness was only on the surface; underneath the lava lay molten.

"We'll try to find the way out of it," the judge went on. "Probably we can send him to Russia. But you keep yourself in hand, Dan."

"Well, I'll try to, father," Danforth replied, rationally.

Judge Crane regarded him a moment, felt reassured, and turned to another phase of the subject, for which the juncture seemed propitious:

"As it stands now, I don't see as you could gain anything by keeping that body up there."

"No, I don't see that I could either," Danforth replied, for he now thought that Ted would bluff that out.

"I want to get that disposed of," the judge urged; "we may as well."

"I can see Eastman — Cordwainer's man — and hear what he has to suggest," Danforth answered;

but he was hardly, properly speaking, thinking about that at all. To him that point had ceased to be important; his mind was really occupied with other things. Nevertheless, perfunctorily, he discussed it with his father for some time, finally saying, rather absently:

"Well, I'll get hold of Eastman and see what he has to say."

With that he left the judge's study — his mind occupied with the other things.

It had been perhaps twenty or thirty minutes since Peggy left the judge's study. Danforth walked to the stairs and started down them — the errand to Eastman vaguely in his mind — and when, his hand on the bannister, he had got down far enough to have a clear view of the hall on the main floor, he saw Ted and Peggy there.

Ted had put on a rough jacket over his thin coat, — for a high south wind was blowing so that one who intended to drive needed a wrap — and a cap such as he commonly wore in his machine. Peggy was slipping on a long coat. Both of them had an eager air. Apparently, they were on the point of leaving the house together; presumably, judging by their costumes, on the point of going away together in a car.

So apparently nothing would answer; nothing would save her! Hardly half an hour ago she had turned pale and gasped when he told her Ted was not to be trusted — and why. Only half an hour

ago she had promised him not to go away alone with Ted. Yet there she was hastily putting on a cloak, apparently eager to be off!

Peggy glanced up then and saw Danforth standing on the stairs — saw his glaring face, and at that evidently she remembered, for the motion of her hands and body suddenly ceased, as though she had frozen in her tracks. Her lips parted.

Then Danforth moved again, going on down the stairs, and as he reached the bottom he saw Ted's long, big-headed yellow car roll up to the west door of the house. Unquestionably they had been going away together. Nothing would answer!

XIV

THE DEVIL'S POT

AS Danforth, at the foot of the stairs, confronted Ted and Peggy, the girl murmured a confused apology to him:

"I forgot, Dan."

She then turned to Ted, wide-eyed, and as though she were just coming out of a dream saying, "I forgot, Ted. I can't go with you now. I have an engagement with Dan. . . ." To her confused mind that seemed to leave it all at loose ends and she added, "We can go later."

Ted didn't understand, and he felt something hostile to himself in the burly man half a dozen feet away; but since Peggy had said she couldn't go because she had an engagement with Dan there seemed nothing for him to do except say, "Oh! . . . Very well then. . . . We can go later."

No one said anything to that, and after an embarrassed instant he repeated, "Very well. . . . I'll send the car back"; whereupon he walked over to the west door and went out to tell the man to take the car back to the garage. He didn't understand what had just happened; he didn't like it; but there seemed nothing else for him to do, and so after standing out there a moment he walked

aimlessly away in the direction the car had taken.

In the hall, Peggy was much more bewildered than Ted — quite incurably at a loss and embarrassed. It all came back to her then — the scene up in the judge's study when Danforth had warned her and she had felt as though the sky had fallen on her. Up there in Danforth's presence, as he held her hand, she loved him and trusted him and what he said had impressed her mind as though truth were stamped upon it.

She had left the study meaning to go and lie down, but there at the head of the stairs had been Ted waiting for her. And he had immediately told her, in intimate secrecy, a most startling piece of news, being himself much excited over it. As she listened to him, looking into the young, eager face that she had kissed and hearing the tones of the voice that had first said "Sweetheart" to her, somehow — rather inexplicably and rather shamefully for herself, she thought — that image which Danforth had stamped upon her mind insensibly all faded out and another image took its place. Without realizing what she was about she just naturally loved and trusted Ted again. And, swept away by his startling news, she clean forgot about Danforth and very readily took up with Ted's project to turn this tremendous news to account.

All of which now seemed to make her a mere thistle-down creature, blown by every wind, without weight or stability — for she had gravely prom-

ised Danforth. So now, left alone with him in the hall, she felt a great confusion and humility; but as she couldn't explain she only murmured again:

"I forgot, Dan. I'm sorry. Forgive me."

It seemed to Danforth that she was dazed, almost like a person partly hypnotized. He rumbled, kindly, "Better go lie down a bit, Peg."

"I will," she said helplessly, and threw off her cloak.

Without speaking again, Danforth put on a hat, selected a stout stick and went out the west door in Ted's tracks.

Nothing, it seemed, would answer; nothing would save her. . . . The girl couldn't understand. He wondered if there had been a sort of hypnotism, and that seemed not improbable. He had begun this affair with the idea that he was going to be as fair to Pennell as Pennell deserved; but now, for the man whose tracks he was following, he felt a perfect hate. . . . A chap who went about beating women, gripping their white throats in brute fingers! He saw again Katey's dead face and Edith's living face, with the marks! And then sweetest Peggy. But that should never happen!

It could hardly be said that he was thinking at all. He was just following the man for whom he felt the perfect hate — a man who was imminently mortal to him like a rattlesnake coiled and on the point of striking. In that perfect hate, as over a coiled snake, one need do little thinking.

Walking beyond the south end of the house, he pulled his hat lower on his head and inclined his body slightly, for the booming south wind struck him ponderably. Mechanically turning his eyes seaward he saw the spray flung high above the rock rim of the shore and his ear caught a deeper tone than that made by the rushing wind and dashing waves — the steady roar of the coffee pot. It was high tide now and with this south wind the pot would be boiling furiously.

He had taken but a few more steps when he saw two figures on the roadway some distance ahead of him. One of them was Ted Pennell. The other was long-necked and slope-shouldered, in a light coloured suit, a cap pulled down over its tall head, a bamboo stick in its hand. Danforth recognized the man as the fool named Thorp, a relative of the furnace man, who had put them on the track in the affair of Katey. Thorp was speaking to Ted and pointing toward the sea.

For several days now Samuel Thorp had been little by little venturing back into his old familiarity with Overlook House. Nothing had happened to him in consequence of any imprudent conversation that he might have indulged in; and then, latterly, he had taken courage from the friendship of his new acquaintance, Mr. Eastman, whom he knew well enough — trust him for that! — to be a detective. In venturing back to Overlook House he sort of felt the detective's shield and buckler; so

now, he was rather at home there again. Meeting Ted Pennell on the road, this blustery day, he favoured him with some conversation. And then, seeing Danforth Crane approach, the old uneasiness overcame him. He terminated his conversation with Ted Pennell and moved off.

And Ted Pennell immediately left the road, walking eastward toward the sea. After a moment Danforth also left the road, turning toward the sea. A little later there seemed to be no doubt about the direction in which Ted was making — no doubt that he was going to the pot. Danforth then modified his course a little, so as to make, also, for the pot — which would be boiling furiously now. Apparently there was no need for Danforth to think; apparently somebody was managing the affair for him.

Country folk, with a fondness for Satanic nomenclature, had long ago called it The Devil's Pot, and as though the putative designer had wished to have the place to himself, a long heap of loose rock had been thrown up, like a screen, to the west of it. As Danforth approached, the pot's roar rose louder and he saw Ted Pennell slip around the rock screen. Except to an observer close at hand, or out at sea, all that went on behind that screen was hidden.

Danforth himself rounded the screen. On the other side of it the roar strained his ear drums, but the pot itself was still mostly hidden, for the crag billowed up somewhat and in order to gain the

pot's edge one had to go down through a little crevice in the granite. Danforth went down through the crevice and saw Ted six feet away, standing on the very brink of the pot looking down into the tumult of the water.

Demoniacal, and worth the Devil's best in that line, it looked today at high tide and under this high south wind — a furious seethe and swirl of rushing water as wave after wave roared in and couldn't get out; here churned into dancing milk, there showing faint, vanishing streaks of green; all whirling and tearing at the rock as though in a fury to escape; the whole surface boiling up nearly to the brim, subsiding and boiling up again, yet every part of the surface in an incessant heaving, pouring and tumbling of its own — like a confined heart of ocean panting in uncontrollable passion.

Whatever foolhardy speculations Ted Pennell may have indulged in on other days, no man could live in that today. Ted stood at the very brink, watching. A featherweight would upset his equilibrium, and this spot was as hidden from human eye as though Overlook and all the coast habitations had been a thousand miles away. . . .

Danforth stepped nearer — no danger of a foot-fall being heard in this tumult. As he did so, Ted — already balanced only by a hair — stooped a little as though to look more intently. Mechanically Danforth looked also and on the opposite side of the pot made out a dark object in the water;

not a rock, but moving. There was instantly something about that object, half seen and half veiled — something about its form and texture — that arrested Danforth's eyes with a sharp clutch, so to speak.

The moving object did not sink or disappear; it only blurred and grew indistinct under a thicker veil of water. Then, as a sporting porpoise rolls an arched back up into view for a deliberate second and vanishes, this dark, moving object came up on the surface and in the three seconds before it sank completely from sight both the beholders knew certainly that it was the body of a man.

Ted took a step backward, turned his head and saw Danforth standing two feet away, which seemed not to surprise him.

"That's a man!" he shouted, to make himself heard above the roar.

Danforth nodded; undoubtedly it was the body of a man.

Many times, in mere foolhardy adventurousness, Ted had studied the currents of the pot, tossing in sticks and logs and watching their behaviour. He knew that while to a casual eye the seethe seemed mere chaos there was, at high tide, and for comparatively bulky objects, a steady drift round and round the edge. He was obviously excited now and he shouted again to Danforth, "It will come this way; we can get it!"

Together, then, they stood watching, and in a

minute or so the dark object again rolled a shoulder, half a back, into view. In eccentric fashion it was making the circuit of the pot. For a moment they lost sight of it, but when they saw it again it had made another stage of its journey. Very deliberate it was in that ghastly pilgrimage as though all the furious motion in which it was immersed affected it not at all. Its deliberateness seemed to say that it was in no hurry whatever, having all time and all eternity in which to complete its journey.

Again they saw it, but as before the face persistently downward and hidden — as though not interested in any watchers on the bank.

"We can get it!" Ted repeated, in a shout. "You come here."

He plucked Danforth's coat as though there was no question of his taking charge of the enterprise, and when they had moved two or three feet he explained, in the necessary high tones, "You sit down here and brace your hand against that; then give me the other hand."

Danforth comprehended what he meant and obeyed, in an odd sort of abeyance, as though he had nothing to do but obey. He seated his heavy body in a little depression in the rim of the pot where he could brace his left hand against a higher ledge, his legs hanging over the rim. When the water beneath them subsided a little following the inrush of a wave, Ted lowered himself over the rim

until his feet rested on the wet and jagged rock below. Then with his left hand he clasped Danforth's right, bracing himself as well as he could against the next inrushing wave. It drenched him to his knees, but he managed to keep his footing.

Thus they waited for the pilgrim. It would be Ted's task to lean out, stoop and seize the body while Danforth held him.

A strange situation, truly — considering all the circumstances. That thought drifted into Danforth's mind.

The pilgrim rolled into view, showing them its back; but too far off. The water boiled over it again. Stooping and straining his eyes Ted indistinctly made out a darker patch beneath a veil of water. His hand gripped Danforth's with all its strength. Leaning out, stooping, he made a grab. An incoming wave washed him from his slippery foothold and he was down in the water, with only the grip of Danforth's hand. But the water laid hold of him, pulling fiercely. At best all the strength of two muscular hands and arms were needed. With the other hand Ted grabbed Danforth's foot, and so held on while another wave ran over him. Then, as the water subsided, Danforth pulling and pulling himself, he regained his footing and climbed up on the rock rim beside his companion, drenched even to his hair. He got his breath, looked at Danforth and laughed, wiping the water off his wet face with an arm as wet.

"Sort of nasty!" he shouted, meaning the grip of the pot. After a moment he added, "Guess we'll have to call Louis." Both of them, on the way to the pot, had noticed the gardener working at some shrubbery.

But neither of them made a move to call Louis. Danforth was not making a move in any respect, but was oddly cut off from moving as though his will had been insulated. There was a certain half-formulated speculation in his mind, however, to this effect: What was the difference between pushing a man into the pot and just letting go of a man who was already in the pot? The latter expedient was, of course, incomparably the simpler and safer. That half-formulated speculation went on in his mind, without an answer. . . . Only when a man risked his life on an errand of mercy and voluntarily trusted himself to the grip of Danforth's hand and that man was down in the water fighting for his life, why Danforth's hand simply wouldn't let go. On the contrary he had clung and pulled with all his might. Such were the facts that had happened, and for which he had no particular explanation.

Ted, drenched and beginning to shiver in the wind, was frowning at the pot. "If I could only use both my hands," he shouted to Danforth. Then an idea struck him. "Let's see your belt," he bel-
lowed.

Danforth, the same passive instrument as before,

took off his belt. Ted examined it a moment and said, "Sure, that will hold me! My belt's strong, too."

He and Danforth had both assumed that the man in the pot was dead. The complete inertness of the immersed body had seemed to proclaim that, and Ted knew that at this state of the water a body might have drifted there for two hours or more. So he hadn't thought of saving a life. He was moved, however, by a common human pity. Some unfortunate — perhaps a tourist — had ventured too close, made a misstep and lost his life. That indefinitely connoted other people, such as a wife and children, for whom the misstep would be poignant. Ted could claim the sanction of pity; yet if he had been brought to judgment and asked why he persisted in trying again instead of summoning Louis, and if he had carefully searched in his mind for an answer he would have had to confess that it was mostly a sporting instinct. He had undertaken a difficult thing and he didn't like to give up; he hated having the pot best him. Spatting his legs and arms to keep the blood going he watched for a further appearance of the body. As he had anticipated, it drifted across just below them and started its circuit again. At longer or shorter intervals they saw it.

His idea was to buckle Danforth's belt through his own at the back, making a long loop of it, by which Danforth could hold him while he had both

hands free. Danforth understood that and waited passively. By that plan once more Ted would be stooping and leaning out over the pot with only Danforth's grasp to sustain him, and this time Ted wouldn't be clasping his hand. If one's fingers relaxed at bit. . . . Danforth waited passively.

But as they waited for that deliberate pilgrimage to bring the object beneath them, a new idea struck Ted. He called out, "Maybe we can bring him to! I'll call Louis!"

At once he sprang to his feet. Mechanically Danforth looked around. So at practically the same time both of them saw, sticking over the edge of the crevice by which one gained the pot, a pair of sloping shoulders clad in light yellow plaid, a long head with a cap pulled down on it, a loose mouth and a pair of pale eyes, one of which had a cast in it, giving a wall-eyed effect.

After all, upon seeing Ted Pennell make off toward the coffee pot and Danforth Crane go in the same direction, Citizen Samuel Thorp's curiosity had overcome him, and he had followed. In a flash Danforth understood that the fool had been watching them, and that if he had let go of Ted's hand the fool would have been a witness to it. . . . Truly, the devil's coffee pot; yet some way the devil didn't have it all to himself. When a man's hand clung to his for life or death some way Danforth couldn't let go; but had to grip and pull with all his might.

While this was flashing in his mind, Ted was bawling to Sam Thorp, "Go tell Louis to come here! Tell him to hurry!"

Citizen Thorp was rather glad to get himself away so easily. Turning back to Danforth, Ted explained in a shout, "Better have Louis. That idiot Thorp is no good."

When Louis, in obedience to this summons and still followed at a discreet distance by Samuel Thorp, stepped down through the crevice to the edge of the pot he saw Danforth seated, holding a leather loop, and Ted Pennell on the slippery rock below pulling a man's body out of the water. The body was hard to handle and Louis hastened to help. Two days before he himself might have pushed Ted Pennell into the pot; but since then he had heard something—which he was necessarily keeping strictly to himself—that quite altered his feeling. He now lent a hand heartily. With Ted's precarious footing, handling that heavy, inert object was not easy. The three of them got it up over the rim and stretched out on its face. As Ted climbed up, Louis turned the body and they saw that it was Lester Hilton.

Ted and Danforth looked at each other a moment, and there was an odd kind of loathness in Ted's voice as he said, "Well—we'll see if we can bring him to."

He knew the "first aid" rules and they set to work—lifting the limp body by the middle to ex-

pel the water, stripping off the wet coat, chafing the limbs, working the arms. For perhaps twenty minutes they worked diligently, with hardly a word except a brief direction from Ted. Then Ted ceased and said, definitely, "It's no use," and stood up. For a moment he looked down at the white and handsome face, quite unbruised from the pilgrimage among the rocks. Then for an instant he and Danforth looked at each other. Some way Danforth was plagued by the idea of another body lying there.

"We may as well leave Louis here with him," said Ted. "Somebody's got to tell Edith."

In that passivity — that odd blankness of mind — which had come upon him of late, Danforth accepted this without comment; only motioning toward his belt, which still dangled at Ted's back, unbuckling it, putting it around his own waist as he and Ted started away. Ted also seemed to have nothing to say. They tramped toward the house. After they had been tramping two or three minutes Ted looked around at Danforth to say, in grave confidence:

"He killed Katey. I knew it as soon as you told me she'd been choked and beaten. He beat Edith today and choked her. I caught him at it." Now that Hilton was dead it seemed to him — without reasoning about it — right enough to say that, although he would not have said it before.

"When Peggy and I drove up to the house from

the station, "Ted went on," I left her downstairs while I went up with my bag. I was passing Edith's door and I heard something — a cry, you know; but it sounded choked. I opened the door. He had her by the throat, beating her. Of course, I started for him; but he ran out through the dressing-room to the next bedroom and got away. She fell as soon as he let go of her. I picked her up. That's how I got my coat bloody. She told me not to say anything, and to lock the door. . . . Naturally she didn't want anybody to see her. I wouldn't have said anything only he's dead."

Danforth had nothing to say to that.

"And then," Ted added, "as soon as the judge told me Katey had been choked and beaten, I knew he did it. There wouldn't be more than one white man in the same neighbourhood who would beat and choke women."

That reasoning sounded hardly conclusive to Danforth, but he had to acknowledge that a young man who reasoned in that manner — supposing him to be sincere about it — could not be altogether depraved. He felt stupid. Only an hour ago his mind had held a perfectly clear, firm pattern of this affair, but now some way the pattern seemed to become confused. He heard himself saying, dully enough, "Hilton was drunk today."

Ted glanced around at him and commented, "He must have been. . . . Probably he came down here and jumped in."

"Likely," Danforth replied.

"That Sam Thorp — up there on the road — told me he saw a man come down here to the pot an hour and a half ago or so, and the man hadn't come away. He's a fool, you know. So I went to look it up; but I had no idea it was Hilton."

Danforth then understood the little pantomime he had seen on the road — Thorp speaking to Ted and pointing toward the sea.

"I told Peggy that Hilton killed her," Ted said after a moment. That, indeed, had been the startling news he had imparted to her at the head of the stairs as she came out of the judge's study.

But in a more or less confused way Danforth had been thinking that statement over during the last few minutes, and he was remembering that Lester Hilton and himself came up on the same train from New York Friday night — the day after Katey disappeared. So it seemed fairly impossible that Hilton had been here on that fatal Thursday. He kept that thinking to himself, however, and nothing more was said between them until they reached the house.

Peggy had meant to go and lie down a while, as Danforth had advised her to; but the commotion in her mind wouldn't permit that. She had aimlessly remained downstairs; and so presently she saw Ted and Danforth approaching the house together from the direction of the sea. As they

got nearer she noticed the state of Ted's clothes and ran to the hall. When the men stepped in she was at the door.

"Why, you're soaked! Did you fall in?" she cried.

Ted spoke to Danforth: "You tell her. She may as well tell Edith. I'll go change my clothes." With that he went upstairs.

Danforth told her, very soberly, "Hilton's drowned — in the coffee pot. Louis is down there with the body."

Peggy breathed "O-h-h-h-!" Then in a hushed murmur, "Is he really dead, Dan?"

"Yes," said Danforth. "We tried to bring him to, but it was no good."

They had before them the bare fact of death — sudden and violent. But each of them had in mind certain other things. Danforth had heard that the dead man had beaten his wife; Ted had told Peggy he killed Katey. Those other things were, so to speak, shock absorbers.

"Edith must be told," said Danforth after a moment.

"Yes," Peggy assented. It seemed to be a woman's task. "Shall I tell her?"

"You can do it best," Danforth replied.

Peggy thought of it a moment and wetted her dry lips. "Do you know how it happened?" For presumably Edith would ask that.

"No. A fellow named Thorp saw him go down

there and told Ted — an hour or more afterwards. Ted went down. . . . I went, too. His body was floating around in the pot. Ted got down on the rocks below while I held him and got the body. We worked half an hour to bring him to. Probably he'd been in the water an hour and a half."

Peggy wetted her lips again — pausing for the plunge, so to speak — and said, "Well, I'll tell her."

Going up to Edith's room she was remembering over again what Ted had told her when she found him waiting for her at the head of the stairs — that Hilton had killed Katey; that he was sure of it. He hadn't told her why he was sure, but only that it was so. Then they had tried together to recall that Thursday — to see if they could bring up some further connection with Hilton. And Peggy couldn't remember that Hilton had been at the house at all that day — was almost sure he didn't come up until the end of the week. That was a bit disconcerting, although Ted still insisted that Hilton killed the maid. Thinking back Ted presently recalled that toward noon Thursday he had overtaken Edith on the road from Stony Cove wearing Katey's hat and cloak — that miserable affair which had got him into all the trouble with Peggy because he was in honour bound not to tell. It had always seemed strange to him that Edith Hilton should be going to Stony Cove in that disguise. Now, with this firm prepossession

as to Hilton's guilt in respect of Katey — a prepossession built on the bedrock fact that Hilton choked and beat another woman — it occurred to him that Hilton must have been at Stony Cove that day and Edith had gone there to see him. He knew the station agent at Stony Cove, and proposed to take a photograph of Hilton up there to see if the agent could identify it as the likeness of a man who had bought a ticket for Boston or New York — Stony Cove being a forlorn little station where comparatively few strangers came. It was upon that proof and adventure in detecting that he and Peggy were setting forth when Danforth interrupted them in the hall. Ted's reasoning had seemed somewhat nebulous to Peggy; but there was no doubt about his firm conviction that Hilton was the man. All of which was in her mind as she went up to Edith's room.

Her knock at the door brought no answer and when she opened the door the room was empty. She was quite sure Edith was not downstairs and stood in the hall for a moment, at a loss. While she so stood the door of Judge Crane's study opened and Lena, the big housemaid, came out rapidly, wiping her eyes. Seeing Peggy she swiftly looked down to the rug and passed with a quick step. Peggy saw that the maid was not only weeping, but pale and agitated.

However, that suggested to her a means of finding Edith. She went down to the judge's study

and rapped. There was a little pause and the judge's voice called, "Come in." Entering, she saw both the judge and Edith sitting at the further end of the room; and gave a little cry.

A broad bandage was wrapped around Edith's head, covering more than half her face and one eye, and the remainder of the face was nearly as white as the bandage. Ted had not told why he believed Hilton killed Katey—not having the stomach to tell that.

"Edith! How did you get hurt?" Peggy exclaimed, hurrying to her.

Edith took her hand, holding it as she replied, "I fell and hurt myself."

With that she turned to the judge, evidently continuing a speech which Peggy's entrance had interrupted:

"He has ability, judge. It's true he isn't very stable—weak in many ways. But there is good in him, too. Lately he has been drinking more than he should. He shouldn't drink at all; he's too excitable anyway. But there's good in him—and ability. . . . I want you to be kind to him."

Peggy perceived that the judge was a good deal moved. He struck a hand across his hair and growled, "Forget it, Edith! Forget it! The slate is wiped. He don't owe me a cent." And in a slightly husky growl he added, "Be sure I'll go a long way to be good to you."

The injured woman's unbandaged eye dimmed

with tears and she replied, low, "Thank you, judge; thank you. . . . That's all, then." She was still holding Peggy's hand, and as she ceased speaking she arose to leave the room.

It had come to Peggy that the man she was pleading for was her husband, who was dead, and a tightness came in the girl's throat. "I have something to tell you," she whispered. Hand in hand the two women left the study and went down the hall to Edith's room.

There seemed something brutal about it, however it might be put.

"It's bad news," Peggy began. "Lester had an accident. . . . He went down to the coffee pot. . . ." The words stuck.

"Is he dead, Peg?" Edith asked after a moment.

Peggy nodded and then told the little she knew — full of pity and self-reproach, with the unreasonable feeling that she was doing something brutal.

When she had heard that little Edith stepped over and lay down on the bed — bandaged and white and small, Peggy hovering uselessly over her, able to do nothing but kiss her hand and choke back tears which were all for the woman on the bed and not for that other, down by the coffee pot who was, no doubt, the greater victim.

After a little while Edith spoke to her: "You mustn't think I'm greatly grieved, Peg. I think it's a relief more than anything else. . . . I asked

the judge to give him another chance. You heard me in there. I'm very glad I did that now. . . . He'd gone wrong in business — stolen some of the judge's bonds. But I think, Peggy — I think he never could have gone straight again, so it's more of a relief than anything else. . . .

"I wanted, my dear, to ask that of the judge and get him another chance if I could — and pay it all up. . . . But I should never have lived with him again. He beat me today, and choked me."

Peggy could not utter a cry; her eyes were quite dry; it seemed to drown her. She sank down on her knees beside the bed, clutching one of Edith's hands between her own.

"He was drunk," Edith explained quietly; "and crazy with fear over what I was going to do. He'd set out to blackmail the judge. . . . Judge Crane will tell you all about that — only the judge don't know he beat me. Not telling him that was part of paying it all up, you see. . . . I think he never could have gone straight again — decayed, Peggy."

Peggy could have said nothing — but just clutch Edith's hand, while her heart cracked with pity.

"I want to talk to you by and by, Peg," Edith went on after a moment. "I want to talk to Ted, too — especially to Ted. I love him too, my dear. But I want to talk to him. He's been lazy and aimless and self-indulgent. I know he's only a boy. But it's time he stopped. He must stop now — before he marries you. . . . You see, Peggy,

when I married Lester it was fairly like you're marrying Ted. You see what a smash it came to. I know Ted's good, but I want to talk to him. . . . And you, Peggy — it's you, too; the woman as well as the man. It isn't just a wedding and a honeymoon and a pretty story that ends with that. You've got a long road to go."

The tears came to Peggy's eyes then. In humble reverence she bowed her head to the breast of the woman who had gone the long road steadfastly and paid it all up.

After a little Edith said, "Judge Crane will have something to tell you — about Katey."

XV

"GOOD OLD DAN"

TO any casual observer that Saturday afternoon Overlook House stretched its grey bulk above the sea in wonted serenity and security. Even to an observer indoors the leisured movements of the household would have appeared to be going forward in the accustomed way — as though whatever vicissitudes might visit a world outside, within these walls, food, amusement, repose and all the incidents of creature cheer and comfort would continue to flow smoothly and simply.

To one observer, especially, nothing about the house seemed amiss. Mrs. Crane, returning from her prescribed drive with Mrs. Loughman — who had been dropped at her own house on the way back — found her home in its familiar aspect. No idea of finding it otherwise ever entered her head, any more than one naturally expects to wake up in the morning and discover that the sea has dried up over night. Spacious, secure, cushioned for her at every angle, she had come to accept it as one accepts a fact of nature.

Her husband met her in the hall, bland to her as usual and in spite of his general angularity with

little touches of gallantry for her, like helping her off with her coat himself instead of leaving it to a servant. She was always aware of that — of his strong and watchful protection over her. Sometimes she laughed over it, fondly, to herself; and sometimes even said to his picture, "My old lover!" Mostly she said it to his picture, for romantic or sentimental demonstrations of affection — such as addressing words of that import to her — seemed never to occur to him; seemed fairly to embarrass him, which, also, fondly amused her.

He asked her about her drive; regretted that the wind was so boisterous. She asked him if he had finished up his business with Danforth; reminded him that he must get out of doors before dinner time. Then she went upstairs, following the prescribed regimen, to have her afternoon nap — during which, by the judge's order, every one must keep still on the second floor. If one were to fall dead one must come downstairs to do it during mamma's afternoon nap-time. Even as she slept, or dutifully tried to, he held a hand over her, so to speak. Today she saw, or heard, nothing whatever to indicate a variation in the usual household order. Of course, she must be told about Lester Hilton; but she would best have her nap first, lest that prevent her from sleeping.

The grounds, as viewed from the house, wore their wonted aspect; but beyond the house's vision, namely, behind the screen of loose rock down

by the coffee pot, there was a variation. Louis the gardener and three strange men were busy down there with a long, dark, inert object and a stretcher. And Samuel Thorp, his pale eyes bulging with excitement, was looking on.

After Mrs. Crane had retired, her husband and his son and Peggy Loughman and Ted Pennell gathered in the further end of the living-room, as the judge had directed. Judge Crane himself was looking very sober as he thought it over for a moment before speaking. He sat upright in a big arm chair, both feet planted squarely on the floor; and the others sitting near naturally waited for him to speak because again he seemed the chief sitting in judgment.

"I think we can probably get this business all straightened out," he began, with deliberation; "but first I want to show you, as near as I can, how it stood in my own mind." He looked at Ted and Peggy, side by side on the settee, as he said that as though it was necessary for them, especially, to know how it stood in his mind.

"Edith has been telling me something," he went on. "It seems, this Thursday that Katey disappeared, she went up to Stony Cove to meet her husband. What for, don't matter now; but she went up there to meet him in the forenoon. She didn't want to be recognized so she borrowed Katey's hat and cloak. Seems Ted overtook her on the road with his car and brought her back here."

"That's it!" Ted exclaimed to Peggy. "It was Edith in my car — not Katey. But I couldn't tell because she told me not to."

"Yes," said the judge with some dryness. "It was Edith in the car — not Katey. But to know how it stood in my mind you must know that I heard — later on — that Ted had Katey out somewhere in his car and brought her back here some time before noon. We heard, too, that Ted had been taking her to dances and so on — running around with the girl."

Ted was going to speak, but the judge cut him short, saying, "That will come up later. That's what we heard, you see; Ted running around with her and fetching her back here to the house from somewhere or other some time before noon that Thursday. Well" — the judge grinned a little — "Benjamin never did approve of Katey. Benjamin's got stricter ideas than a bishop and Katey wasn't much subject to discipline. Now, somewhere around noon, or not much after noon that Thursday, Benjamin saw Katey slip into Ted's bedroom."

"I didn't know it!" Ted exclaimed.

"That will come later," the judge reproved. "He saw her slip into your bedroom. He didn't know whether you were in there or not; and naturally he didn't like it. He'd already heard of your running around with the girl — seems it was talked about among the servants. Being a discreet

kind of person, however, Benjamin kept his mouth shut. He told me afterwards that he kept watch a few minutes and Katey didn't come out, and then he had other business to attend to; it was getting on toward lunch time. He had to go downstairs."

The judge frowned regretfully for an instant and added, "Probably Benjamin was right all along, and the girl shouldn't have been kept here. She was heedless and insubordinate — always more or less of a commotion in her wake, you know, like the churned water in the wake of a power boat. But servants aren't easy to get up here nowadays and mamma sort of liked the saucy baggage, so Katey stayed on. Probably that was a mistake. . . .

"Well, Benjamin had that incident on his mind — the girl slipping into Ted's room; he kept an eye out for her as much as he could, along with his other duties; but she didn't appear. There were some clothes in Ted's dressing-room that needed pressing anyway, and after a while Benjamin went up there. . . .

"It was along about three o'clock in the afternoon that I went up to my den. I'd picked up the mail on the table in the hall and was going up there to look it over. I'd just fairly got into the room, when Benjamin came in after me — about as agitated, I reckon, as a proper butler ever could be. He told me that Katey had been killed — was dead in the room next Ted's. Of course that

knocked me into a cocked hat; but I went in there with him, and there she was, dead.

“Ted’s bedroom and the one next to it — like the rooms across the hall — are in a suite, with a dressing-room and a bathroom between them, opening into both of them. Benjamin had gone into Ted’s room, you see, to get the clothes out of the dressing-room — and also, with that incident of Katey in mind, to take a little look around. He didn’t see anything unusual in the bedroom, but no doubt he was looking pretty sharp and when he went into the dressing-room he noticed a good-sized spot on the rug that looked as though it might have been scrubbed not a great while before. Then he went into the bathroom and looked in the hamper where dirty towels are thrown and there he found a wet towel, twisted up. When he unfolded it he saw it was dirty as though it had been used to scrub the rug and although it seemed to have been rinsed it was still bloody.

“Of course, he looked closer than ever then. He didn’t find anything more in the dressing-room or in Ted’s room, but he remembered that in the adjoining room there’s a window seat — the top lifts up, you know; it’s really a long cedar box that’s used to put spare bedding in. He looked in the box and lifted up some spare bedding, and there was Katey’s body, with Ted’s revolver beside her. That’s what I saw when I went in there with Benjamin. I examined the revolver and saw that one

chamber had been shot off. And Katey'd been shot through the heart. She'd been struck and choked, too—the marks were on her throat—and her hair was mussed up. There wasn't any doubt that she was dead. . . .

“As I said to Dan a while ago, what I thought of, before everything, was my wife. You all know she ain't been very well lately, even for her. I thought it very likely the shock of that would kill her. Anyway I didn't mean that she should have the shock. That's what I thought about. Well, we locked the doors and considered what to do. Of course, we couldn't leave her there. It would be only a question of a few days at most until she'd be found. It was clear enough that we'd have to get her out of the house—the sooner the better. As it happened mamma was lying down then and everything was quiet on that floor. Benjamin and I talked it over and it seemed we might just as well get her downstairs then as ever. He went down to the basement and locked the doors of the storeroom and laundry. Then we got a clear coast and carried her to the elevator and so down into the laundry, where we laid her on some dirty clothes.”

The judge paused an instant, with a faint smile for the weakness. “We wanted to cover her up. There wasn't anything handy but dirty clothes. It seemed sort of rotten to cover her with them; she was a pretty thing, even then. So I pulled off my coat and spread it over her.”

At that point Danforth drew a hand down his cheek. Imaginative Sam Thorp had said it was Ted Pennell's coat that lay over Katey — which, perhaps, had made a great difference.

"Then I went upstairs," the judge continued, "and telephoned for McKeon to come over here right away. I was a good deal on tenterhooks, not knowing what might break loose at any time, and I didn't dare leave the house. So McKeon came over here — Benjamin watching for him and slipping him up to my den. I put it to him that it was part of his job to help me get the girl buried. It seemed safe enough to me — and to him, too. He came over that night with a closed car. Fortunately his wife knows how to drive and has good nerves, so she drove the car — which saved bringing a chauffeur into it, and the fewer people there were in it the better. He took the body home and bought a coffin next day and issued a death certificate and got the girl buried. . . .

"I'm telling you all this," said the judge after a moment, "so you can see how it stood in my mind." He looked over at Ted, hardily, and continued, "Probably it's only fair to say that something else was more or less in my mind, too. I've never seen very much of Ted until the last three or four weeks here. It's true that in a way I've known him a good while — coming and going; bobbing into sight for a short time and bobbing out again, as I might say. I knew him as a youngster who was my wife's

nephew and of whom she was very fond, but we never had much occasion to get really acquainted.

"I thought he was a very likeable youngster, so far as I could see; and in a general sort of way my impression was that he was a pretty lazy, aimless sort of youngster who hadn't anything particular on his mind except to amuse himself. . . . Probably it's more my fault than it is Ted's that we hadn't got better acquainted; especially when I knew how my wife felt about him. I ought, no doubt, to have taken more pains to get really acquainted. But as long as I was thinking of him as just a good-natured, lazy, aimless young man it didn't strike me that getting better acquainted was much worth while.

"I'm not trying to make you uncomfortable, Ted, or to excuse myself; but I want you to get this thing as it stood in my mind, because I think it's important to you that you should. When this bombshell burst and the circumstantial evidence was laid before me, there wasn't anything in my mind about you that particularly resisted it. If you were drifting along where the drifting was easiest, with no more idea than to stuff yourself with cookies — why it didn't seem particularly unreasonable that you'd been angling for a very pretty parlour maid. That's what such young men pretty commonly do. It didn't seem unreasonable to me that you'd had the girl out somewhere and brought her back to the house and that she'd slipped into

your room to see you and that you'd got into some kind of a row and scuffle in there. Of course I didn't pretend to know exactly what had happened, and I didn't really care to know — exactly. Some kind of a row, it seemed to me. Benjamin told me that for some time your revolver had been lying in plain sight on top of the chest of drawers in your dressing-room — where you'd happened to drop it, I suppose. Say you'd been treating Katey rough and she caught up the gun and you grabbed her hand and the gun went off. As to exactly what had happened, I didn't care particularly. I thought you'd been naturally panic-stricken, and hid the body in the first likely place you thought of, and scrubbed the blood off the rug.

“But, of course, I was wondering what you were going to do. You didn't show up for dinner that Thursday night. When I saw there was no place for you at the table, I asked mamma about it, casually, and she said you'd telephoned that you wouldn't be home that night. I've forgot who it was she said you were with — some of your young men friends. I was grateful to you for having the forethought to telephone to her, and my notion was that you'd very likely skip out in the morning — on some pretext or other. If you did I thought my mind would be easy.

“But next forenoon you showed up again, cool as a cucumber apparently. I watched you out of the tail of my eye more or less and I concluded that

you were nervier than I had thought, and a tougher nut, too. It worried me a good deal — wondering what line you would take, for it might be a line that would spill the beans and let mamma in for it after all. Of course, I thought you couldn't be such an idiot as to suppose the body would lie there indefinitely without being discovered. . . . At any rate I credited you up with more nerve than I'd thought you had before.

“Once I almost made up my mind to talk to you; but I thought I'd wait a day. I thought very likely you wanted to wait a day and make preparations for leaving. I saw you around with Peggy and I thought you were waiting a little to square things up with her. Then I thought you had some designs on her, and that disturbed me a good deal. You see I didn't care to have you know that I'd disposed of the body for that would look like letting you off too easy. All around it seemed best to wait a day, and I did.”

The judge rubbed his chin, and added candidly, “There's something about it that I don't understand yet. The next day, which was Saturday, you went to Benjamin and got the key to Katey's room and locked yourself in there and searched the room — as I looked at it, to see whether there was anything among her belongings to implicate you. Then you came to me and as soon as I gave a hint you asked me to send you away somewhere — a long way for a long while. That was exactly what

I thought you ought to do — get out, a long way for a long while — but still I didn't propose to let you know I had disposed of the body if I could help it. I don't understand yet why you searched Katey's room."

"I'll tell you," said Ted. "I told Peggy that Katey wasn't in my car that Thursday and Peggy said she was, for she and her mother had seen her. I couldn't deny that because I couldn't tell her it was Edith. Peggy was disgusted with me, and I was disgusted with myself. . . .

"Judge, you say you thought I was lazy and aimless. I was all that. . . . You see, I'd got to thinking about that in a different way than I'd ever thought of it before. I wanted to marry Peggy and I knew I was just a loafer. I'd flunked every real job that had ever been put up to me — college, and out there in California and in New York. I didn't care a rap, you see; they'd just looked stupid to me, so I'd side stepped 'em. I'd been a loafer. I knew it. And there was Peggy, awfully sore at me because she thought I was lying to her and didn't take this Katey affair with any seriousness. . . . It was all a rotten mess, you see — all gone to pot. I just wanted to dig out somewhere and get a real job — a long way off.

"And then there was something else. A lot of people don't like Chet Beals, you know. Peggy doesn't like him, for one. . . . And I don't deny that he probably does some pretty raw things. I knew

he'd been a whole lot taken with Katey. In one way that was none of my business, you know, and none of anybody's business. Everybody that's got good sense loathes a prig." The young man was frowning there and seemed to find the going difficult. "It's true enough that if my sister was a pretty parlour maid without any brains to speak of I wouldn't want her to know Chet Beals. Of course, if I had a sister she wouldn't be a parlour maid. But Peggy, you see — well, she was taking this Katey affair sort of as though Katey was her sister. . . .

"I thought it pretty likely that Chet Beals did have Katey somewhere or other, and if Katey was sort of Peggy's sister — well, you see, that was a rotten mess, too. But how could a fellow do anything about it without looking like a fool and a prig? Of course, in a movie a fellow could put a pistol to Chet's breast and say 'Unhand the maiden!' But in real life everybody that heard about it, from here to California would roll over and die laughing. What could a fellow do, without looking like a fool?"

"A week, maybe, before this, Chet Beals and I and a couple of other fellows had stopped down at Seaview. You know those little jimcrack shops opposite the big hotel. Chet bought a gold chain with a pendant set with diamonds and rubies and sapphires and so on. It looked like fifty thousand dollars, if you didn't look very close, and it cost

him thirteen dollars and a half. Some way I got sort of a hunch at the time that it was for Katey. Katey'd take anything from anybody, you know — from a banana to a railroad. . . .

"Well, along with my other troubles I was troubled about this Katey affair — from the way Peggy took it. I suppose it was a fool thing to do, but I wanted to know whether Chet Beals had her and whether I could do something about it. It kept running around in my head and finally I got the key to her room from Benjamin. And sure enough, after I had looked around a bit, there was Chet's jewelry and a couple of snap-shot pictures of him. I thought sure, then, he had her — and it seemed I ought to do something about it. But what could I do without looking like a fool that was mixing up in something that wasn't any of his business? They're both of age, you know. . . . Yet — well, I had been around with Chet a good deal and I defended him to Peggy. So there was just another rotten mess, you see — all a mess. I thought the thing to do was to dig out and get a real job and go to work at it and see if I couldn't make something of myself. That's just the long and short of it, judge."

"Well," said the judge, judicially, "that sounds reasonable to me now; but at the time I hadn't a doubt you wanted to dig out for another reason, and I meant to pack you off to Russia where there's some investigation going on in the oil line. You



agreed to go down to New Jersey and stay there until I sent you word, but I suppose when Peggy telephoned you to come and see her in New York you were excusable for breaking the parole. . . . Like so many other things, you see, this case looks all one way from one side and all the other way from the other side."

All three perceived that the judge seemed ill at ease, and more than a little embarrassed — a slight and rather foolish smile appearing on his face as he struck his hand across his hair.

"All depends on the way you look at it," he repeated. "As I looked at it from that side I thought I was a pretty wise and capable old man. But as I see it from this side I was more or less just a damned fool." He turned to Danforth with candid deprecation, observing, "We were both blockheads. . . . What really happened — well, it's fairly silly. . . .

"That poor little Katey, you know, was a great flirt. Louis was engaged to Lena, and then Katey flirted with him and set him crazy about her, and that made Lena wild with jealousy. Katey laughed at her and Lena was going to punch her head, but Katey ran away. Then Lena was laying for her. Edith saw her; and Katey told Edith that Lena was after her. Edith thought nothing about it at the time, for she had something else on her mind; but today when she found out that Katey'd actually been killed, she remembered it and went to Lena,

and Lena came to me and told me the truth.

"Lena was laying for Katey and saw her go into Ted's bedroom. You see, Katey'd seen Ted's gun there and had some idea of getting it and bluffing Lena. She'd said something of the kind to Edith, who didn't take it seriously at the time. No doubt Katey did step in there to get the gun; but probably when she saw it she was really more afraid of carrying it than she was of Lena. Anyway, Lena says she waited a few minutes for Katey to come out, but as Katey didn't come out Lena started in there after her, knowing Ted wasn't there. She popped in and met Katey coming out. They had a spat, you know, and Katey said she'd go with Louis as much as she pleased. She also said something about a horse — referring to Lena's size — a fool maids' row, you know; both of them mad. Lena fell on her and choked her and walloped her and Katey broke away and ran into the dressing room for the gun, Lena after her. Seems Lena is some scrapper when her blood is up. Katey grabbed the gun and Lena grabbed Katey and the gun went off and Katey was dead. Lena was paralysed then, and carried the body in the next room and hid it, and she's been scared stiff ever since. Seems she told Louis about it yesterday and was going to drown herself but Louis persuaded her not to. And so far as Katey is concerned," the judge concluded, "that is the whole story."

There followed a pause, which prolonged itself.

"I thought Hilton did it," said Ted, absently.

"Well," said the judge, "I reckon Hilton did enough. Edith didn't tell me so; but I guess he did enough — to her."

"I know he did — but why?" said Ted.

"Hilton had got hold of this Katey business and was trying to blackmail me with it," the judge replied. "He almost put it over, too, but I stood him off for a day. Meanwhile Edith had been to Lena and discovered the truth. Hilton was drunk anyway — and half crazy. When Edith told him the truth and insisted that she must tell it to me in spite of him — which would knock the bottom out of his blackmail enterprise — he no doubt went plumb crazy and tried to choke her into promising to keep still. . . . It's a good thing he's dead. . . .

"I've got another word to say to you, Ted. I misjudged you and did you wrong. But I'm an old codger and my mistakes don't matter much now. You're starting out, and you're wanting to marry Peggy. I love Peggy myself and I think a man that wants to marry her has got to set a pretty high mark for himself. I want to say to you, give people something solid to go on so the next time anything comes up they won't misjudge you."

"I know, judge; I know, that's all true!" said Ted earnestly.

But the judge pressed on, "When you found yourself in a mess, you thought you wanted a real job and would make good at it; but you wanted it

a long way off — something novel and exciting. Get all that out of your head. Going off to some new scene is just fooling yourself. It's the same world and the same you over in Russia that it is here. Hard work is just as dull over there as it is in New York. Take the job that offers, the one nearest at hand, and pitch into that."

"I'll go to New York next week," Ted declared.

"That sounds right," the judge replied, his face lighting with the strong smile that changed it in a twinkling. "I did you wrong; but I don't want to do you the further wrong of offering you any martyr's crown. I want to offer you a long-handled shovel instead." His eyes shifted to Peggy and the smile broadened into a chuckle as he added, "This foolish little person will probably ruin you with crowns if you'll let her."

Peggy arose, stepped over to the judge's chair and kissed him.

Danforth got up, too, and as he walked from the room he was thinking that Peggy had nothing to say to his going. With a deep sense of defeat he wandered out of the house, toward the stables. . . . If he had not gone so far; if he had stopped short of telling Peggy that stuff about Ted's abnormal mind. . . . But he had gone that far.

Walking heavily on he soon saw a slope-shouldered, long-necked figure in a light yellow suit — Mr. Samuel Thorp still hanging about, alert for any further interesting developments. At once

Danforth was struck with wonder. It was this mere loquacious and lying fool who had led him, an able man, off on that absurd dance — down to the very brink of the coffee pot! But in a moment he knew that was not quite true; it was his own jealousy that had misled him. He had lost the stake; perhaps he had lost also what he had before, her filial love. . . . If only he had stopped short of that last touch about Ted's degeneracy; for that would be hard to forgive. But he hadn't stopped short. . . .

Well, he could go back to New York. He was not a mere blundering blockhead down there. When it came to oil, he was an able man.

The light was softening to sunset when Danforth returned to Overlook House. At that time three persons sat in Edith Hilton's room — Edith herself in a reclining chair; Ted Pennell and Peggy Loughman in front of her.

Presently the bandaged woman's low and earnest voice ceased. Ted, with downcast eyes, reached out for Peggy's hand, in humility.

"I know, Edith," he said; "and I will! . . . Peggy, I will!"

"And I, too," Peggy murmured.

In that high moment Danforth stepped into the room. The moment's height shone in all three of the faces there. It's atmosphere of a great reconciliation with life, and submission, hope and love

pervaded the room. Danforth was instantly sensible of that.

As the ponderous, swarthy man advanced to a chair, what shone in their faces seemed not exactly to withdraw from him or shut him out, but to regard him abeyantly. He sat down, studied the rug an instant and turned to Ted:

"You're going to New York next week?"

"Yes," Ted replied.

Danforth took his instant of deliberation and looked only at Ted as he rumbled: "Your father is a fine man in a great many ways; but I can teach you business better than he can. Come into my office with me."

Ted's face shone anew, but there was astonishment in it, also. "You mean it?" he cried.

"Yes, I mean it. Come into my office with me," Danforth repeated.

He kept his eyes to the young man's face, but he was well enough aware of the brightness, for him, in the faces of the two women. An instant later he heard Peggy murmuring, "Good old Dan!" He felt that the atmosphere of the room included him.

THE END







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